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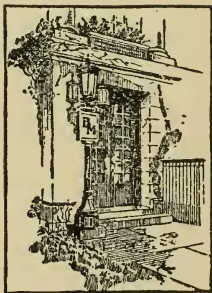
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A BOOK *of*
ONE-ACT PLAYS



✓

A BOOK OF ONE-ACT PLAYS

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I am greatly indebted to the authors and publishers who have so generously permitted their plays to appear in this collection. I desire to express special thanks to Professor T. E. Rankin of the Rhetoric Department of the University of Michigan, whose enthusiasm first inspired me with interest for the one-act play; to Principal M. H. Stuart of the Arsenal Technical Schools for his kind interest in the work; and to Miss Mabel Goddard, Head of the English Department of the Arsenal Technical Schools, whose generous assistance and cooperation have been invaluable in the preparation of this little volume.

B. L. S.

INTRODUCTION

THE ONE-ACT PLAY: Its Relation to the Short Story

One fateful night, we are told, a king was entertained at the home of his most famous general. But even as he supped, the treacherous host sat in another room of his castle, planning the murder of his royal guest. He mused upon the deed at length, until in the silence of his own chamber, he began to speak aloud:

“If it were done when ’tis done, then ’twere well
It were done quickly.”

And the significance of Macbeth’s assertion is not confined to the complexity of the affairs which called it forth. It would scarcely be an extreme perversion to extend the significance of this declaration further. Indeed the “key-words” of all modern life may be said to be, “’Twere well it were done quickly!”

This tendency toward brevity and compression, is perhaps most phenomenal in the field of literature. In a certain sense the short story has already superseded the novel; and now its *congenial* cousin, the one-act play, has come to assume certain of the prerogatives of the traditional drama!

Of these two “short” forms, the short story having been longer with us, is better known. Its limits, pos-

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sibilities, and technique have been so frequently exhibited as to require little discussion. The workings of the one-act play, though similar, are more abstruse. In either case, however, it is essential for a sane comparison that the form shall speak for itself.

An interesting introduction to the modern one-act play may be obtained in the little plays of this volume. Simple situations, "out-of-the-way" episodes, single ideas, and few characters make up the effectiveness of each.

As may be seen, often the one-act play is only a "dramatized anecdote" without any particular complication of plot. In so short a space, there can, of course, be little or no character development, but there certainly is character portrayal, and that of a rather subtle sort. The characters in these plays are suggested by a few broad telling strokes, at the outset being sometimes connected by a bit of sparkling dialogue:

THE BANK ROBBERY

CHIEF ROBBER (*Whispers*): The stuff is in our hands, boys. Get to work.

FIRST ROBBER: I got me drill ready.

CHIEF ROBBER: Quick, attach the wires.

SECOND ROBBER: Say—soft pedal that gas. I ain't hurryin'.

Were these characters to be described in a short story they would undoubtedly lose some of the innate charm which the first-hand contact of the playlet reveals. In the one-act play a personal sense of companionship is gained through action and speech, while in the short story the characters are viewed more dis-

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tantly and indirectly because of the combination of speech and action with description and analysis.

How utterly inadequate would indirect methods become in the treatment of vivacious life! The short story gives its readers the opportunity of probing down into the depths of a man's mind, we may study there at length his problems and his emotions,—his loves and his hates. The value of all this should not be underestimated. There is, however, a possibility that there has been of late an extreme psychological emphasis in the short story, so it is refreshing to find more frequently in the one-act play the action which results in a deed. And in one-act plays like *The Bank Robbery* and *The Deacon's Hat* physical action has its importance.

This physical action of the one-act play creates intensity. There is a compression about the play for the narrow compass demands that the dialogue though entertaining be succinct. It is not always so with the short story, often its primary interest is in style. Even when the plot of the story is well handled it is frequently the complete and illuminating descriptions which give it its fine artistic finish.

On the other hand, some one-act plays are simply impressions, but powerful impressions. In fact there is little to forget, because there is so little action. As in the little drama, *In the Light of the Manger*, and *Ever Young* the illumination is great just because there is no thesis, there is simply a transcendent picture of life. In even so short a compass the reader's experience is permanently enriched; he learns for the first time the life of a new world.

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Now if this same theme were to be developed in the short story it might have a tendency to become sentimental; it would then demand a fuller treatment, and there is danger in expanding what is best when only stated. But here in the little drama there is nothing irreverent, nothing cheap.

Like the short story, the one-act play would teach as well as entertain. *The Exchange* illustrates well the acceptability of dramatic teaching, and the superiority of its portrayal over the didacticism of a story in the Hawthorne style.

Sometimes the one-act play presents an ugly picture, and the effect as a whole is morbid and unhealthy. Somehow we like this kind of realism better in the story; for example, in one such as Hardy sometimes employs. We want it meditated; even a taste taken directly in the one-act play makes a person's mouth "puckery."

But by far the greater number of one-act plays are of a healthier nature, though they often deal with the follies and secret tragedies of modern life. Among the one-act plays which seem most akin to the story are those which George Middleton styles "plays of contemporary life." They deal with intense moments in the lives of thinking, feeling men and women. As Middleton himself expresses it, "They make no pretense save to show character in action, and in several instances to picture its different reactions from the same stimulus." "Certain ideas," he tells us, "find their best expression in the concentrated episode."

An so one might continue, finding always in the one-act play as in the short story, variety of theme,

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variety of treatment, and of charm. In each we expect a skilful technique; indeed both demand a fineness of construction. The short story has been defined as "a brief, original narrative free from excrescence of events cunningly arranged for the production of a single predetermined effect." But where we might endure a little extraneous material in the short story, we can not permit it in the one-act play. The latter form must always remain a supreme example of concentration, intensity, and "crystallization."

There are those with us who decry both the brief story and the brief play because of their limitations. To be sure, it must be admitted that in these shorter forms problems do not have to be solved, and certain arbitrary premises can well be taken. Both the dramatist and the novelist, on the other hand, have to possess a keener and more penetrating imagination, and a finer discrimination than the authors of the short story and the one-act play. Sometimes, however, limitation spells advantage. With Percy MacKaye we may say that these distinctive forms are capable of expressing what the longer forms can not.

So we return to Macbeth as he sits in his castle, planning the murder of his royal guest. Again we would venture a literary application of his regicidal musing:

"If 'twere done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly."

And in the light of modern workmanship one might be forgiven for adding this explanatory sentiment:

"For 'tis not only quickly done, but well!"

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NEVERTHELESS

By

STUART WALKER

STUART WALKER

Stuart Walker is one of the best-known producers and playwrights in America. He was play reader, actor, and stage manager with David Belasco, 1909-14, but he has been an independent producer since July, 1915. He is a producer in New York during the winter, and in Indianapolis and Cincinnati during the summer. He is the author of *Portmanteau Plays*, 1917, *More Portmanteau Plays*, 1919, *The Birthday of the Infanta*, a dramatization of Oscar Wilde's story, *Portmanteau Adaptions*, 1921, etc. He is a member of the American committee of the Salzburg Festival Theatre, one of the greatest forces in the theaters of the world.

Stuart Walker is the originator of the Portmanteau Theatre, and has frequently delighted "young people from seven to seventy" by his delightful Portmanteau performances. Both the children and grown-ups who have been fortunate enough to see these performances will never forget them.

No playwright is more dearly loved by the children than is Stuart Walker, and he pleases them greatly when he himself acts. (He has plans, too, for a real theatre especially for the little folks.) Probably not since the days of *Peter Pan* has anything pleased the children so much as Mr. Walker's own plays, such as *Six Who Pass While the Lentils Boil* and its sequel, *Sir David Wears a Crown*. Adults, too, are charmed by the picturesqueness, originality, quaint humor, and beautiful idealism of the Portmanteau

plays; they will never forget that "a trimplet is a hole that a sunbeam makes in a shadow," that "etiquette is a set of rules made by people who never smile," or that "heaven is full of days and they're all coming this way."

All theatre-goers owe Stuart Walker much. Edward Hale Bierstadt has said of him: "I do not think I have ever known a man who gave more unsparingly of himself in all his work. His never wavering belief in his work and his ability has brought him through many a pitfall. It is not a petty vanity but the strong conceit of the artist, that which most of us call by the vague term 'ideals'."

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The regeneration of this burglar is not at all an ordinary one since it is accomplished by two children and a dictionary. But the very whimsicality of the play is its charm. As Edward Hale Bierstadt puts it, "Whether or not one likes *Nevertheless* depends entirely on one's point of view. If one looks at it in the cold gray light of middle-aged inexperience it is doubtless a rather tedious trifle, but if one's eyes are those of childhood 'where every one lives happy ever after' and an all abiding faith in the ultimate fitness of things is the chief tenet of one's conviction—one will like the play."

Nevertheless can be directly traced to a course in the English and Scottish Ballad that Mr. Walker once took under George Morey Miller, who is now profes-

sor of English in the University of Idaho. It was an experiment in the simplicity of "folk" lore tried on the stage.

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NEVERTHELESS

CAST OF CHARACTERS

A GIRL.

A BOY.

A BURGLAR.

THE SCENE *is a room just up-stairs.*

THE TIME *is last night—or to-night, perhaps.*

PROLOGUE: Our next play is an interlude before the curtains. You may sleep during an interlude, but you mustn't snore or have the nightmare because that would be very discourteous to the author and very discouraging to us. We can not live if you do not like us, and you can not like us if you do not keep awake.

(After the Prologue has bowed the Device-Bearer brings two chairs, a stool, a table, a lamp and places them on the forestage. If you are not a very grown-up you know immediately that you are in a room that belongs to very young people.)

(The Boy enters carrying a book. He is angry. He looks around to see if any one is looking and then goes to the table and tries to remove some money from a small bank that has two locks; but he can't find the keys.)

(As he is shaking it violently in an attempt to force it, the Girl enters.)

GIRL: Billie!

BOY: I will force it!

GIRL: You made a compact with me.

BOY: Don't use words like that—I hate words.

(He continues to try to force the bank.)

GIRL: It's a miserable shame, Billie Cleves!

BOY: Now, Lou, don't use any more words on me. I won't stand it.

GIRL: Well, what shall I say?

BOY: Say dirty shame.

GIRL: Billie!

BOY: I don't care. I'm tired of being corrected all the time. When I'm old enough to paddle my own canoe, I'm going to murder grammar all the time. I'm going to use short words and I hope I'll say "I seen" and "I would have went."

GIRL: Billie Cleves!

BOY: And, if I can get this bank open, I'll go away forever to-night and I'll talk just as I please.

GIRL: My, Billie! You are angry!

BOY: Angry! I'm mad! I'm awful mad! *(He shakes the bank terrifically.)*

GIRL: You'll break it.

BOY: I don't care. I'm going to bu'st it—

GIRL: Billie, mother wouldn't like that word at all.

BOY: I don't care. I'm going to bu—break it open and then I'm going to leave home forever. *(He puts it on the floor and starts to trample it.)*

GIRL: Billie Cleves, don't you dare! That's half mine. And you can't open it unless we both agree.

BOY: Who said so?

GIRL: Why, it was our compact.

BOY: If you were fourteen years old, Louise Cleves, and your mother punished you for speaking bad English you'd forget all about compacts.

GIRL: No, I wouldn't.

BOY: Yes, you would.

GIRL: No, I wouldn't.

BOY: You don't know what you'd do; you're not fourteen and you're not a boy.

GIRL: I wouldn't break a compact if I were a hundred and fourteen.

BOY: Now, Lou, listen.

GIRL: I don't want to listen.

BOY: Just put yourself in my place.

GIRL: Billie Cleves, we agreed never, never to open that bank until we were in need of food and clothing.

BOY: Well, I'm in need, Lou.

GIRL: No, you're not; father and mother give you all the food and clothes you want.

BOY: But I'm going to run away forever and go to Honolulu or Texas.

GIRL: No, you're not.

BOY: I am.

GIRL: Well, Billie, you deserved to be corrected.

BOY: All I said was, "Jim's a rotten rider." And he is.

GIRL: Well, that wasn't nice.

BOY (*Exasperated at not being able to open the bank*): Lou, where is my key?

GIRL: I put it away.

BOY: Where?

GIRL: Our compact was for me to take the key

to your blue lock and hide it, and you were to take the key to my pink lock and hide it so we couldn't fall into temptation.

BOY: I'll pick the locks like a burglar.

GIRL: You can't. They're both pick-proof. And there's only one key in all the whole wide world for each lock.

BOY: I'll get your key and open your lock.

GIRL: My key won't open your lock.

BOY: I can't find yours where I hid it.

GIRL: I found it and hid it again.

BOY: Where is it?

GIRL: I don't think I ought to tell you, Billie, I'm afraid you'll fall into temptation.

BOY: How about you?

GIRL: Boys are more easily tempted than women.

BOY: H-m!

GIRL: Because they get out more.

BOY: I'll throw it and break it.

GIRL: Now, Billie, don't be rash.

BOY: I don't care.

GIRL: Father'll hear you.

BOY: Father won't hear me much longer about this house.

GIRL: Please, Billie, read your book.

BOY: I won't do it, I won't. I'm sick of goody-goody books.

GIRL: What did mother give you to read?

BOY (*Sullenly*): There it is.

GIRL: *The Narrow Path!* Why, she sent me up here to read that, too.

BOY: What for?

GIRL: I said "he don't" instead of "he doesn't."

BOY: Just after I said it?

GIRL: Yes.

BOY: You are a goose.

GIRL: But I don't get angry like you do.

BOY: You're not as old as I am. Other boys of my age do pretty much as they please.

GIRL: Well, here we are. There's no use quarreling, because it's mother's plan to make us read a fine book whenever we make mistakes in grammar. And you know mother's plans! (*She opens the book.*) Oh, dear, no pictures! . . . Let's hurry up.

BOY: I won't do it.

GIRL: Come on, Billie, and get it over with.

BOY: Give me the keys or I'll break—I'll bu'st it.

GIRL: I won't give you the keys and you won't break it—William Cleves, if you don't live up to our compact, I'll not have anything more to do with you.

BOY: I don't care. (*He throws the bank violently.*)

GIRL: Billie! (*She pounces upon the bank and bursts into tears.*) I never thought you'd do it. (*The Boy moves about uneasily.*) I never thought you'd do it. (*She weeps torrentially.*)

BOY: Now, Lou—

GIRL: You broke our compact and tried to destroy our bank.

BOY (*Defiantly*): I tried to bu'st it—and I hope I did.

GIRL: Billie Cleves!—Well, you didn't even nick

it. (*She takes up the book after carefully placing the bank so that the Boy can't get it.*)

BOY: Lou, won't you lend me the keys a moment?

GIRL (*Relentlessly*): You broke a compact.

BOY: Please, Lou.

GIRL: I have my reading to do.

BOY: I'm going to go away—forever—Lou!

GIRL: Good-by.

BOY (*Fiercely*): I want my money!

GIRL: It's our money. And I'm the guardian.

BOY: All right. . . . Good-by.

GIRL: Good-by. (*Reading.*) "The Narrow Path is very steep and straight. It leads to a land of gold and it is not easy to negotiate because Heaven thinks it is best for people to climb for what they want. Nevertheless—"

BOY: Are you going to give me the money to run away with?

GIRL: No.

BOY: Good-by.

GIRL: A compact is binding to both parties, father says.

BOY: Good-by.

GIRL: Good-by (*Reading.*) "Nevertheless — neverthelss—" (*She begins to giggle deliciously.*)

BOY: What's funny, Lou?

GIRL: Come here and look, Billie. (*The Boy drags himself to the book.*)

BOY: What?

GIRL: This word.

BOY: Never—the—less. It's like any other word.

GIRL: No, it isn't. Steep and straight and they all look like something. But this is just funny.

BOY: Nevertheless. (*The Girl goes off into gales of laughter.*)

BOY (*Reading further and turning the page*): Here it is again. (*He laughs.*)

GIRL: Where?

BOY: Here. (*Turning back.*)

GIRL: Neverthe—(*turning the page and going into another paroxysm of laughter as she finds the rest of the word on the next page*)—less.

BOY: It is funny-looking!

GIRL: What does it mean?

BOY: I'll look in the dictionary.

GIRL: I know what it means in a way, but I can't explain it—

BOY: So do I. (*He goes to the dictionary.*)

GIRL: Never—the—less. (*She looks up and sees that the Boy is busy. She looks around cautiously, then takes up the book and hides it. As she hears the Boy coming back, she resumes her seat and the book.*)

BOY: It means notwithstanding, yet, however.

GIRL: Dictionaries never tell you the real, honest, true, live meaning, do they, Billie?

BOY (*Fascinated*): Never—the—less.

GIRL: It's three words all huddled together. (*She pictures them on her fingers.*)

BOY (*Counting the words on his fingers*): Never—the—less.

GIRL: How did they come together?

BOY (*Losing himself in the puzzle*): I don't know.

GIRL: Let's ask mother.

BOY (*Remembering his anger*): No, I won't.

GIRL: I will.

BOY: Let's be independent, Lou. I don't like to ask favors when I'm punished.

GIRL: Well, I'm being punished, too; but I want to know all about this funny word.

BOY: Let's try some other way.

GIRL: I know!

BOY: What?

GIRL: They say if you put out the lights and shut your eyes very tight and wait very patiently that an elf will come and tell you anything you want to know.

BOY: I don't believe in elves.

GIRL: Billie!

BOY: I don't.

GIRL: The plural of elf is elves. We had it to-day.

BOY (*Exasperated*): I knew it,—but I get tired of having to think about everything before I speak. Sometimes I try not to think at all.

GIRL (*Going to the lamp*): I'm going to turn out the light.

BOY (*Scornfully*): Nothing will happen.

GIRL: Well, we can try.

BOY: Lou, where's the bank?

GIRL: I hid it, Billie.

BOY: You shan't hide my money!

GIRL: Keep quiet, Billie, and sit down. (*She puts the light out.*)

BOY (*Sheepishly*): I feel so silly.

GIRL: Are your eyes shut?

BOY: No.

GIRL: Billy, please shut your eyes.

BOY: I won't do it . . . I'm going to turn on the light.

GIRL: Now, Billie . . . (*He evidently starts for the lamp.*) I'll give you the keys if you're good.

BOY: Now?

GIRL: No, afterward.

BOY (*Turning on the lamp*): Promise.

GIRL: Yes. (*Out goes the light as she pulls it.*)
Are you sitting down?

BOY: Uh-huh!

GIRL: Are your eyes shut?

BOY: Uh-huh!

GIRL: Tight?

BOY: Uh-huh!

GIRL: And when he comes don't talk.

BOY: Uh—.

GIRL: 'Cause you don't believe and you might frighten him away.

BOY: Uh—.

GIRL: Where are you, Billie?

BOY: Here I am.

GIRL: Move over.

BOY: There isn't much room.

GIRL: Now. (*Silence.*) Do you hear anything?

BOY: No. (*Silence. A pale light appears between the curtains, then a dark form. The light is shut off and presently reappears at the table. The Burglar opens the drawer and, taking out some pretty*

things, puts them in his pocket. The light goes out. Silence.)

GIRL: Billie, I just can't stand it a moment longer. Don't you hear the elf? . . . *(A sound.)* There he is! *(The light comes on again and the Burglar takes up the bank. Just as he is putting it in his pocket, the Girl speaks.)*

GIRL: Do you know what nevertheless means? *(The bank goes clattering to the floor. The light is turned upon the two children. The Burglar takes a step forward and stumbles over the bank.)*

BURGLAR: Don't holler. *(The Boy turns the light on.)*

BOY: A burglar!

GIRL: If you don't move, Billie, a burglar won't hurt you.

BOY: Hold up your hands, Lou.

BOY AND GIRL *(Holding up their hands)*: We give up.

BURGLAR: Put out the light.

GIRL: Please don't put out the light. . . . We'll be good. *(A door is heard to close in the next room.)*

BURGLAR: Put out the light. *(The light goes out.)* Who was that?

GIRL: Mary.

BURGLAR: What's she doing?

BOY: Don't you tell him, Lou. Make him let you turn the light on.

GIRL *(Deciding to weep)*: I'm afraid of the dark.

BURGLAR: Quit your bawling and put on the light. *(The Boy puts on the light.)* What's she doing?

GIRL: She's setting the burglar alarm for the night.

BURGLAR: How do I get out of here?

GIRL: You can't get out because if you open anything all the bells will ring and the police will come.

BOY (*Bravely stepping forward*): We'll put you in jail. (*As the Burglar turns, however, he wilts.*)

GIRL: Billie, let's let him go if he tells us what nevertheless means.

BURGLAR: Huh?

GIRL: Do you know what nevertheless means?

BURGLAR: What's nevertheless?

GIRL: It's a word.

BURGLAR: What's the game?

BOY: If you know what nevertheless means we'll let you go.

GIRL: It's a compact.

BURGLAR: Promise you won't give me up?

GIRL: We won't give you up. . . . Sit down.
(*The Burglar sits.*)

BOY: Where's your pistol?

BURGLAR: I ain't got none.

GIRL: Oh, you mustn't say that.

BURGLAR: Well, I ain't.

GIRL: It's very wrong to say "I ain't." My mother would make us read all *The Narrow Path* if we talked like that.

BURGLAR (*Puzzled*): What!

BOY: They carry pistols in Texas.

BURGLAR: Well, I ain't never used none, and I ain't never been in Texas, and what's more I ain't never going to Texas!

GIRL: He's a very pleasant burglar, Billie.

BURGLAR: Well, I'm in a pickle, but I can't hurt no kids.

GIRL: See, Billie, how bad grammar sounds?

BURGLAR: I don't care nothing about grammar. When you have to paddle your own canoe, you can't take no time for grammar.

GIRL: Oh, dear, Billie, don't ever paddle your own canoe . . . Billie . . . (*She goes to whisper to the Boy. To the Burglar, as she passes him*): Excuse me. (*To the Boy*): I'm going to try mother's plan on him. I'm going to read to him! (*The Burglar rises and looks around.*)

BOY (*Whispering*): I'm going to call father.

GIRL: Now, Billie, maybe we can make him good.

BOY: Well, he can't get away and he hasn't a pistol—

BURGLAR: Hey, quit your jawing and give me up if you want to.

GIRL: We're not going to give you up.

BURGLAR: Huh?

GIRL: We're going to read to you.

BURGLAR: Quit your kidding.

GIRL: How does it feel to be a burglar?

BURGLAR: Not so good.

GIRL: Aren't you afraid to be a burglar?

BOY: 'Course not. Look how big he is.

GIRL: Aren't you ashamed to be a burglar?

BURGLAR: Well . . . I ain't never burgled before.

GIRL: Well, that's not so bad, but just the same we're going to read to you.

BURGLAR: What for?

GIRL: Because you use bad grammar.

BURGLAR: You're funny kids. Ain't you scared?

BOY (*Magnificently*): No!

BURGLAR (*Turning suddenly*): Huh? (*The Boy retreats ingloriously.*)

GIRL: You wouldn't hurt us, would you?

BURGLAR: Why wouldn't I?

GIRL: We didn't do anything to you.

BURGLAR: You trapped me.

GIRL: We didn't know you were coming.

BURGLAR: What was you hiding for?

GIRL: We expected some one else.

BURGLAR: Go on! (*The Boy moves a chair cautiously toward the Burglar and finally summons the courage to sit down beside him.*)

BOY (*Pleasantly*): Did you know Jesse James?

BURGLAR: I heard of him but I ain't never seen him.

GIRL: What made you begin?

BURGLAR: Never mind . . . I began and I got caught. . . . Now what?

GIRL: I'm going to read to you.

BURGLAR (*Resignedly*): Go ahead.

GIRL: Do you want to read, Billie?

BOY (*Unselfishly*): No!

GIRL: This is all about the narrow path.

BURGLAR: Uh-huh.

GIRL (*Reading*): "The Narrow Path is very steep and straight. It leads to a land of gold and it is not easy to negotiate because Heaven thinks it is best for people to climb for what they want. Nevertheless—"

(The Boy and Girl burst out laughing so suddenly that the Burglar is quite startled.)

BURGLAR (*Uneasily*): What are you laughing at?

GIRL (*Pointing to "nevertheless"*): It's such a funny word.

BURGLAR: Ain't it just like other words?

GIRL: Don't it look funny?

BOY: Don't it look funny?

GIRL: I mean doesn't it look funny? *(The three huddle together over the book.)*

BURGLAR (*Muttering*): N-E-V-E-R-T-H-E-L-E-S-S. Huh! It does look sort o' funny . . . What's the rest of it?

GIRL (*Reading*): "Nevertheless the narrow path is not all hardship."

BURGLAR: Maybe not; but it was pretty hard for me.

GIRL: Have you tried it?

BURGLAR: Yep. But I slipped. . . . Go on.

GIRL (*Reading*): "On the other hand, the primrose path is broad and it slopes gently downward, but it leads to the land of thorns. Neverthe—*(She turns a page)*—less—" *(Again the children go into gales of laughter.)*

BURGLAR: Huh?

GIRL: Look. *(Again they huddle over the book.)*

BURGLAR: N-E-V-E-R-T-H-E-L-E-S-S. . . . It is funny. *(He joins heartily in the laughter.)*

GIRL: You see—it's three words and they don't mean anything unless they are all huddled together just like we are now. *(They all laugh uproariously.)*

BOY (*On the friendliest of terms now*): Do you walk the primrose path?

BURGLAR: Go on! I'm in the land of thorns.

GIRL: Well, how did you get there if you didn't walk the primrose path?

BURGLAR: I just naturally fell.

GIRL: Don't you know the meaning of nevertheless?

BURGLAR: I sort o' know the meaning, but I can't put it into words.

GIRL: Can you act it out?

BURGLAR: What do you mean—act it out?

GIRL: Sometimes when Billie and I can't put things into words we act them out. Like this: If I want to tell some one what revolves means I just do this . . . and then they know.

BURGLAR: Aw, yes, you pretend!

GIRL: Oh . . . Well—Can't you p-p-pertend nevertheless?

BURGLAR: I hardly think so.

BOY: Did you get tired on the narrow path?

BURGLAR: Ye-eh. . . . But I wish I hadn't.

GIRL: Can't you climb back?

BURGLAR: Nope. It's too late.

GIRL: Mother says it's never too late to do right.

BURGLAR: Sure it is. A man what's been in jail can't get straight again.

BOY (*Admiringly*): Have you been in jail?

BURGLAR: No, but once is enough.

GIRL: When are you going to jail?

BURGLAR: To-night, I guess.

BOY: What for?

BURGLAR: For breaking in here!

GIRL: We aren't going to send you to jail.

BURGLAR: Maybe not, but your paw and maw will.
(*Whimsically*): 'Sides I can't tell you what nevertheless means and I can't act it out. And a compact's a compact, ain't it?

GIRL: Mother won't put you in jail. She's too kind.

BOY (*With sad memories*): But she's awful strict about grammar and ugly words.

GIRL: She says it's easy to walk the narrow path.

BOY: Father isn't so sure, but he says it can be done.

GIRL: Come on and we'll help you.

BURGLAR: Come on where?

BOY: Come on and walk the narrow path with us.

BURGLAR: Where is it?

GIRL: Here.

BURGLAR: What's the game?

GIRL: Mother says if we can walk a straight line out that door without wabbling, we can walk the narrow path all our lives without any trouble.

BOY: To speak of.

BURGLAR: What's on the other side of that door?

BOY AND GIRL: Father and mother.

BURGLAR: You seem to be pretty straight kids, but it's too late for me.

GIRL: No, it isn't.

BURGLAR: Yes, it's too late. I'll take the back door and try to make my get-away.

GIRL: Billie, you ask him.

BOY: I'd like to have you come with us, sir. Dad's a fine man and mother's a great woman.

GIRL: All we have to do is to walk straight through that door without wabbling—

BOY: Come on—

BURGLAR: I think it's too late for me—nevertheless—(*He takes their hands.*)

GIRL (*Ecstatically*): Oh, he's acted out nevertheless! Billie, don't you see the real, honest, true, live meaning? . . . Come on, let's start. (*They start carefully for the door and, as they come to the safe they stop. The Burglar looks ruefully at it a moment.*)

GIRL: Don't wobble now. We've almost made it—(*They keep on for the door.*) Isn't it easy? And mother says if you can do this little bit, you can do it always. (*When they disappear through the door, the play is over.*)

THE HEART OF PIERROT
A ONE-ACT PLAY FOR CHILDREN

By

MARGRETTA SCOTT

MARGRETTA SCOTT

Margretta Scott has always lived in St. Louis, has written since 1914, and is at present working on her first novel. Miss Scott supplies no autobiographical information, but her record as a writer is distinctive and impressive. She is the poet who won the recognition of the late William Marion Reedy, in whose *Mirror* her poems have appeared. She has also contributed to Harriet Monroe's *Poetry Magazine*, and to the *Touchstone*. Her play, *Three Kisses*, won a prize in a drama competition in 1919. Several of her poetic plays have been published in *The Drama* (Chicago). She possesses an exquisite gift of symbolism and lovely fantasy.

THE HEART OF PIERROT

The "symbolism and lovely fancy" of Margretta Scott are always refreshing. Pierrot is a lovable little hero who chooses wisely his precious gift from the "Clown of Clowns." And he makes a happy discovery,—that there is no need for economy in the use of laughter.

PIERROT: But, mister, suppose I use up all the laughs?

CLOWN OF THE CLOWNS: For each laugh you take out, two more will take its place.

And in the end the Clown of Clowns gives us more philosophy than we at first realize:

“Do you know what your bag will be? . . .
It will be the *heart* of Pierrot.”

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Margretta Scott, 5414 Delmar Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri.)

THE HEART OF PIERROT

CHARACTERS

PIERROT: Eight or nine years. He is dressed as a typical little clown, in a white suit with black buttons, and with pointed cap. He carries a jumping-jack in one hand, a red bag in the other.

MAMA PIERROT: A middle-aged woman. She is very fat, with whitened face, a white dress, with black buttons down the front of the waist, a white apron on which are pasted bright colored figures of clowns, dogs, cats and the like. A tall white cap is on her head.

AN OLD WOMAN: She is fat and wears a bonnet and shawl.

A NEWSBOY: Eight or nine years old. He is ragged and dirty, and carries papers under one arm.

YOUNG GIRL: She is prettily dressed.

LITTLE GIRL: Seven or eight years old. She is richly dressed and carries a doll in her arms.

MOTHER AND CHILD: The mother about thirty, the child three or four. The child is running by the mother's side, laughing and skipping.

NEGRO BOY: Eight or nine years old. He is ragged,

dirty and carries a sack of coal on his back.

CLOWN OF THE CLOWNS: Very, very old. He is red, fat, rolling in gait. He is dressed as the other clowns, but in richer materials, with small bells sewed on his clothes which make a jolly noise when he walks.

SCENE: *In a quaint little street there is a queer little red brick house with green shutters on which are crescent moons. Steps lead up to house. In the front yard are wooden cats, dogs and chickens, all brightly painted. There is snow on the ground for it is an afternoon in winter.*

Mama Pierrot is standing in front of the house talking to Pierrot who has just come from the school where little clowns learn to be funny.

MAMA PIERROT: Were you funny to-day at school, dearie?

PIERROT (*Working his jumping-jack*): Yep, I made the teacher laugh so hard he most fell off his high stool.

MAMA PIERROT (*Proudly*): You always were good at playing. (*Anxiously*.) Did you know your somersault?

PIERROT (*Not so glibly*): I knew the single somersault, but I didn't do so good at the double one.

MAMA PIERROT (*Pleating the ruffle around Pierrot's neck*): Say "well," dearie, not "good."

PIERROT: I didn't do so well. (*Sticking out his tongue and trying to reach his nose*.) To-day I reached my nose.

MAMA PIERROT: Be careful, dearie, don't stretch your tongue.

PIERROT (*Opening his red bag*): I need some new toys—these are most worn out.

MAMA PIERROT (*Looking into the bag*): Toys are so expensive these days. I must try to get some second-hand ones. Are you careful at school when you play with them?

PIERROT: Yep. (*He takes a feather out of his pocket and tickles the back of his mother's neck. They both laugh uproariously.*)

MAMA PIERROT: I must go in now and tie up those pig tails for dinner.

PIERROT (*Laughing*): I just love pig tails—they're so funny. What kind of ribbon are you going to use?

MAMA PIERROT (*Thinking*): How about blue?

PIERROT: I like red. (*Chuckling.*) Ain't it funny when you take the ribbon off and they wiggle all around the plate?

MAMA PIERROT (*Absent-mindedly*): Yes. (*Putting her hand under Pierrot's chin.*) Dearie, be sure and whiten your face before dinner.

PIERROT (*Sulkily*): It don't need whitening.

MAMA PIERROT (*Reprovingly*): Is that the way for a little clown to act?

PIERROT: Well, I don't care. I whitened it this morning.

MAMA PIERROT: Do you want to look just like any other little boy?

PIERROT: No, ma'am.

MAMA PIERROT: Well then, keep your face whitened. (*She starts to go into the house.*)

PIERROT: I haven't got anything to do—what shall I do?

MAMA PIERROT: You'd better study your playing for to-morrow—try turning those double somersaults.

PIERROT: I'm tired of that. (*Discontentedly.*) I haven't got anything to do.

MAMA PIERROT (*Coming back to him*): I know what would be nice.

PIERROT (*Interestedly*): What?

MAMA PIERROT: You stand here, and every little girl and boy who pass crying, make them laugh.

PIERROT (*Clapping his hands*): That'll be fun—to make every little girl and boy who pass here crying, laugh. (*Mama Pierrot goes into the house. Pierrot sings a tuneless little song; "They'll go by crying and I will make 'em laugh." He works his jumping-jack and tries to walk on his hands. A Fat Old Woman enters from the right. She shuffles by, smiles at Pierrot, and goes on. After she passes a Newsboy enters from the left. He is crying and blowing on his hands to make them warm. His newspapers are under his arm.*)

PIERROT: Hello. (*The Newsboy puts his papers down and beats his hands together.*)

PIERROT (*Offering his jumping-jack*): Here. (*The Newsboy, still crying, shakes his head and blows on his fingers. Pierrot works the jumping-jack, but the Newsboy does not notice him.*)

PIERROT (*Suddenly inspired*): I know a game for cold hands. (*The Newsboy looks at him.*) It's called "Hot Hands."

NEWSBOY (*Dubiously*): Does it make your hands hot?

PIERROT: Sure.

NEWSBOY (*Putting his hands in his pockets*): How do you play it?

PIERROT (*Laying his jumping-jack on the pavement*): You got to sit down to play it. (*They sit on the house steps.*) Now you do what I do. (*Thinking.*) I know a game that's better than "Hot Hands"; it's "*Pease Porridge Hot.*" We'll play that. Now you do what I do. (*Pierrot puts his hands on his knees, slaps them together, and turns them palms out. He sings, "Pease porridge hot, pease porridge cold, pease porridge in the pot, nine days old. Some like it hot, some like it cold, some like it in the pot, nine days old."* He suits the actions to the words. The Newsboy follows him. Soon they are both laughing.)

PIERROT: Now are your hands cold?

NEWSBOY (*Putting his hands to Pierrot's face*): Feel.

PIERROT: They're hot as a fox.

NEWSBOY (*Laughing*): Gee, that's funny talk—"hot as a fox." (*Picking up his newspapers.*) I got to beat it. So long. (*He runs off laughing. Pierrot plays "Pease Porridge Hot" with himself, singing the words. A pretty Young Girl enters from the left. She smiles at Pierrot, walks past him and disappears. After she passes a richly dressed Little Girl, carrying a doll, enters. She drops the doll.*)

LITTLE GIRL: Oh, my! (*She picks up the doll, whose face is broken, and starts crying.*)

PIERROT (*Working his jumping-jack frantically*): Say, look here, ain't that funny?

LITTLE GIRL (*Burying her face in her arm*): Oh, my doll, my pretty doll!

PIERROT (*Examining the doll*): What's her name?

LITTLE GIRL: Dorothy. (*Sobbing.*) She was my favorite, she was the prettiest doll I had.

PIERROT: Well, you shouldn't have picked her up, you know.

LITTLE GIRL: Why not? She's my doll.

PIERROT (*Mysteriously*): You should have left her in the snow. (*He pauses.*) You know what the snow is, don't you?

LITTLE GIRL (*Interestedly*): No—what?

PIERROT (*Dramatically*): It's Santa Claus's mailbox.

LITTLE GIRL (*Round-eyed*): What?

PIERROT (*With conviction*): It's Santa Claus's mail box.

LITTLE GIRL: Honest?

PIERROT: Yep—if you left that doll in the snow Santa Claus would drive by—

LITTLE GIRL: With his reindeers?

PIERROT: With his reindeers—in his big sleigh.

LITTLE GIRL: And what would he do?

PIERROT: He would take your doll out of his mailbox.

LITTLE GIRL: Out of the snow?

PIERROT (*Nodding*): Yep, out of the snow—that's his mail-box.

LITTLE GIRL: Then what would he do?

PIERROT: He would take it home, and have it

fixed up, and put it in the stocking of some little poor girl.

LITTLE GIRL (*Delightedly*): Oh, I think that would be very nice. (*Clapping her hands.*) Let's put her back in the snow and bury her. (*They bury the doll in the snow.*)

LITTLE GIRL: I would like to kiss you, you funny little boy. (*Pierrot laughs shyly, and they kiss each other. The Little Girl runs off laughing. Pierrot opens his bag and takes out a rubber ball. A Mother, her Little Girl skipping by her side, enters. They walk across and go out. After they pass a Little Negro Boy comes in. He is carrying a sack of coal on his back. He puts it down and starts to cry, one hand to his eyes, the other trying to rub his back.*)

PIERROT: Hello.

NEGRO BOY (*Blubbering*): My back hurts—dat coal weighs a ton. I'm sick a-toting it.

PIERROT: That's not coal.

NEGRO BOY: I reckon it is coal.

PIERROT: No, that's not coal.

NEGRO BOY (*Blinking*): What is it den?

PIERROT (*Dancing around the sack*): That's a little white pig.

NEGRO BOY: Go on!

PIERROT (*Laughing*): Sure it is. I heard him squeal when you put him down.

NEGRO BOY (*Looking into the sack*): Sure dat's coal—and it's as black as I am.

PIERROT: It's a little white pig, and you'll eat him for dinner.

NEGRO BOY: That's good eatin'—pigs.

PIERROT (*Sticking out his stomach and carrying an imaginary platter*): You'll carry him like this on a big plate.

NEGRO BOY (*Laughing*): Go on!

PIERROT: He'll be brown then 'stead of white, but his tail will still be curly.

NEGRO BOY (*Interestedly*): Them pigs' tails are crimped tight as my wool. (*They both laugh.*)

PIERROT: And do you know what he'll have in his mouth?

NEGRO BOY: Teeth, I reckon.

PIERROT (*Dancing gleefully*): No.

NEGRO BOY (*Excitedly*): What den?

PIERROT: A red apple.

NEGRO BOY (*Laughing*): Go on!

PIERROT (*Dramatically*): And do you know what he'll have in his eyes?

NEGRO BOY: I 'spects he'll have eyes in his eyes.

PIERROT: No.

NEGRO BOY: What?

PIERROT: Red cranberries.

NEGRO BOY: Go on!

PIERROT: His eyes will be of red cranberries.

NEGRO BOY (*Admiringly*): He'll be real smart-lookin'. (*Picking up his sack of coal.*) Go on, this ain't no pig. (*He goes off laughing. The Clown of the Clowns comes in from the right. His bells are making a jolly noise as he walks. He stops before Pierrot, his hands on his hips, and looks down at him laughing.*)

PIERROT (*Looking up*): Who are you, mister?

CLOWN OF THE CLOWNS: I'm the Clown of the Clowns. (*Pierrot takes off his cap respectfully.*)

PIERROT (*Appraisingly*): You're awful old, ain't you?

CLOWN OF THE CLOWNS: I was born long ago—long ago.

PIERROT (*Interestedly*): How long ago?

CLOWN OF THE CLOWNS: When the world first grew sad I was born.

PIERROT: Why was you born then?

CLOWN OF THE CLOWNS: Because the world had forgotten how to laugh.

PIERROT: When do you think you'll die?

CLOWN OF THE CLOWNS (*Resignedly*): When the world can laugh without me I will die.

PIERROT: Oh! (*There is a pause.*)

CLOWN OF THE CLOWNS: I've been watching you make the children laugh. You've done work a clown should be proud of.

PIERROT: How could you see me?

CLOWN OF THE CLOWNS (*With dignity*): Am I not Clown of the Clowns?

PIERROT (*A little frightened*): Yes, sir.

CLOWN OF THE CLOWNS: I want to give you something. What do you want?

PIERROT (*Animatedly*): A lot of things.

CLOWN OF THE CLOWNS: Think carefully. I can give you just one thing.

PIERROT (*Thinking*): I want a bag—(*He hesitates.*)

CLOWN OF THE CLOWNS: Yes—

PIERROT: I want a bag of laughter.

CLOWN OF THE CLOWNS (*Pleased*): Very good, very good.

PIERROT: Yes, sir.

CLOWN OF THE CLOWNS: I'll give you a bag full of laughter—and it will never be empty.

PIERROT: But, mister, suppose I use up all the laughs.

CLOWN OF THE CLOWNS: For each laugh you take out, two more will take its place.

PIERROT (*Clapping his hands*): Thanks—thanks.

CLOWN OF THE CLOWNS: Do you know what your bag will be?

PIERROT: Just a bag.

CLOWN OF THE CLOWNS: It will be the heart of Pierrot. (*The Clown of the Clowns pats him on the head and walks up the street. Pierrot hears a rapping at the window. He looks around and sees Mama Pierrot who is smiling and beckoning him to come in. He goes to the door and stands with his hand on the door knob, looking up the street where the Clown of the Clowns has disappeared.*)

CURTAIN

THE BANK ROBBERY

A TAKE-OFF

by

MAX EHLMANN

MAX EH RMANN

Max Ehrmann was born in Indiana, and is now, during a part of each year, a resident of Terre Haute. He is a graduate of DePauw and Harvard and is a member of the Author's Club of London and of the Author's League of America.

Mr. Ehrmann's earlier works are *A Farrago*, a collection of prose stories and sketches, and *The Mystery of Madeline Le Blanc*, a novel. He has published books of poems at intervals. His recent works are the beautiful poetic dramas, *David and Bathsheba*, *The Wife of Marobius*, and *Jesus, a Passion Play*. The work which has won for this author universal recognition and which perhaps best shows his aspirations, is that beautiful prose poem, *A Prayer*. It has been printed into the millions of copies, translated, and is known almost the world over.

Max Ehrmann is so true an artist that he can not yield his talents to commercial ends. He himself gives as an article in his artistic creed: "I would rather live plainly and be the author of some bit of chaste prose that should abide amid the perpetual flux, than to live luxuriously on the returns of innumerable volumes of merely commercial fiction."

The one-act play, *The Bank Robbery*, is very unlike most of Mr. Ehrmann's work. It is quite as delightful in its own way, however, both to the reader and to the Little Theatre lover.

THE BANK ROBBERY

As the author's subtitle indicates this play is a take-off on the labor situation. Though Mr. Ehrmann writes farce only occasionally, his usual work being exquisite poetic drama and tragedy, he has here shown himself to be a master of farcical plot, climax and humor. The student who enjoys O'Henry's surprise endings in prose fiction will appreciate the element of surprise here. It is interesting in this connection to contrast the difference between prose fiction and dramatic technique.

(Copyrighted. Applications to produce *The Bank Robbery* should be addressed to Mr. Max Ehrmann, 128½ South Sixth Street, Terre Haute, Indiana.)

THE BANK ROBBERY

CHIEF ROBBER.

FIRST ROBBER.

SECOND ROBBER.

NIGHT WATCHMAN.

POLICEMEN.

THE SCENE is in front of a money safe, the door of which is dimly lighted by a single electric light. All else is in darkness.

CHIEF ROBBER (*Whispers*): The stuff is in our hands, boys. Get to work.

FIRST ROBBER: I got me drill ready.

CHIEF ROBBER: Quick, attach the wires.

SECOND ROBBER: Say—soft pedal that gas. I ain't hurryin'. - (*He unscrews the electric bulb over the safe, and inserts another attachment. Instantly the low buzz of the drill is heard. The room is now dark except for a flash-light on the drill at the safe door.*)

CHIEF ROBBER: She's running fine. Lay her to. (*The sound changes a bit as the drill gnaws into the steel.*) Get out the dynamite and the fuse.

SECOND ROBBER (*Flashing his light over a grip*): Can't you see me diggin' fer ut?

CHIEF ROBBER: Hurry up, and don't talk so loud.

SECOND ROBBER: Who's runnin' this job?

CHIEF ROBBER: I am.

SECOND ROBBER: You does the talkin', but we does the work.

FIRST ROBBER (*The buzz of the drill ceasing*): Cut off the face gas, or I quits, an' gits out. The drill makes 'nough noise.

CHIEF ROBBER: Turn on that drill.

FIRST ROBBER: When you quits talkin', I goes tuh work, not before.

CHIEF ROBBER: You won't—eh? (*Flashing his light on the drill.*) Give it to me. I'll drill.

FIRST ROBBER: I'll give ut tuh you on the head. Back up.

CHIEF ROBBER: Give me that drill.

FIRST ROBBER: Lay down and be still. (*The buzz of the drill is heard again.*)

SECOND ROBBER: This yere dynamite and fuse ain't never been attached yet.

CHIEF ROBBER: Well, you attach them.

SECOND ROBBER: Me? It ain't me work. It was your wife's job before we left the house.

CHIEF ROBBER: You do it. Hurry up.

SECOND ROBBER: I ain't doin' no woman's work.

CHIEF ROBBER: Attach that fuse, I tell you!

SECOND ROBBER: No rough talk.

CHIEF ROBBER: How are we going to get the money inside there if you don't attach that fuse to the stick?

SECOND ROBBER: Maybe we don't gits the swag.

FIRST ROBBER (*The buzz ceasing again*): If youse two don't quits the racket, I don't drill, and I gits out of 'ere.

SECOND ROBBER: He wants me tu do the job his wife oughter done. Would you?

FIRST ROBBER: No. What is ut?

SECOND ROBBER: He wants me tuh attach the stick and the fuse—would you, pal?

FIRST ROBBER: No. He kin send fer his wife. (*He resumes drilling.*)

CHIEF ROBBER: How are we going to get the money if you don't join the fuse and the dynamite? In God's name tell me that!

SECOND ROBBER: I ain't answerin' no questions. I'm standin' on me rights. Attachin' fuses and sticks ain't me work.

CHIEF ROBBER: Hand them to me. (*Flash-light shows that he does so.*) Flash on me. I'll attach them. (*He struggles with the material.*) How do you do it? I don't understand it.

SECOND ROBBER: All you kin do is talk.

CHIEF ROBBER: Show me how to attach these.

SECOND ROBBER: I ain't teachin' no apprentices. Too many people in the business now. You might quits us and go tuh work fer yourself.

CHIEF ROBBER: You fool! How are we going to get the money if you won't do it or show me?

SECOND ROBBER: You promised us the swag before daylight. We expects you tuh keep your promise. There is two of us and oney one of you. See?

FIRST ROBBER (*Buzz suddenly ceasing*): The hole is t'ru. Gimme the stick.

CHIEF ROBBER: The dynamite and the fuse are not attached yet. He won't do it.

FIRST ROBBER: You do ut.

CHIEF ROBBER: I don't think I understand how.

FIRST ROBBER: What are you good fer, if you don't understands the work?

CHIEF ROBBER: I direct the work. I don't have to understand it. That's what I've got you fellows for. My investment, my capital, is my brains. I got everything ready—didn't I? I knew where the money was. I arranged the hours. I put you right here, next to it.

SECOND ROBBER: Should I do ut, pal?

FIRST ROBBER: No. Stands on yer rights. What will become of us if we doesn't stands on our rights?

SECOND ROBBER: You ought to brought a fuse-attacher along with us, if your wife didn't wants tuh do ut.

FIRST ROBBER: We'll waits till you can send fer a fuse-attacher.

SECOND ROBBER: Me and me pal strikes till de fuse-attacher comes.

(Footsteps are heard. They come nearer; then die away.)

CHIEF ROBBER: He's gone.

FIRST ROBBER: Who was ut?

CHIEF ROBBER: Night Watchman, I think. We've got to be quiet. If he hears us it's all over.

FIRST ROBBER: He might shoot.

SECOND ROBBER: We might have tuh divide the swag wid 'im.

CHIEF ROBBER: We haven't got the money yet. Don't forget that. Hurry up—*(A deep-tongued bell begins to strike.)*

FIRST ROBBER: What's that? *(A crash.)*

CHIEF ROBBER: What's the matter with you?

FIRST ROBBER: I dropped me drill. We're cetched. Chief, what'll we do?

CHIEF ROBBER: Be quiet. (*The striking of the bell ceases. He throws his light over the room.*) There, it's a clock, standing in the corner. It's four o'clock. For the last time, will you attach the fuse?

SECOND ROBBER: I will if I gits fifty per cent. of the swag.

CHIEF ROBBER: And him and me together get only fifty per cent.?

SECOND ROBBER: Yes.

CHIEF ROBBER (*To First Robber*): What portion do you want?

FIRST ROBBER: I wants fifty per cent. too, same as me pal.

CHIEF ROBBER: You two fellows are crooks. You're thieves.

SECOND ROBBER: If you was one you could do somethin' besides talk.

CHIEF ROBBER: Where do I come in?

SECOND ROBBER: After I gits me fifty per cent. and me pal gits his fifty per cent., what's over is your'n.

CHIEF ROBBER: There can't be anything over if each of you gets fifty per cent.

FIRST ROBBER: Maybe you'll git more'n us. You don't know how much swag is in that safe. We stands firm on fifty-fifty.

(*Footsteps are heard again.*)

CHIEF ROBBER: Duck! Lights out!

SECOND ROBBER: I puts out me light. But I don't ducks fer nobody.

CHIEF ROBBER: Be quiet.

(The steps come nearer, a flash-light plays over the room, and falls on the three robbers.)

NIGHT WATCHMAN *(Covering them with a revolver)*: Hands up, or I'll shoot! *(They raise their hands.)*

CHIEF ROBBER: Don't shoot. We're not enemies of yours. We are enemies of the owner of the money in the safe. You don't own the money—do you?

NIGHT WATCHMAN: No, I don't; but I'm protecting it. The first man that drops a hand gets a bullet. Come on.

CHIEF ROBBER: You're protecting it?

NIGHT WATCHMAN: Yes.

CHIEF ROBBER: For how much a week?

NIGHT WATCHMAN: That's none of your business. Come on.

CHIEF ROBBER: You're ashamed to tell.

NIGHT WATCHMAN: Well, it ain't very much.

CHIEF ROBBER: That's what I thought. Say, Watchman, is your car a Packard or a Winston? Do you take your dinner at the Club at two-fifty per meal?

NIGHT WATCHMAN: I ain't got anything to do with that talk.

CHIEF ROBBER: Watchman, what is your golf score now? And how beautiful and well dressed and idle your wife and daughters are! And your son blows in a hundred dollars some nights and never thinks of it.

NIGHT WATCHMAN: Keep your hands up.

CHIEF ROBBER: And when are you going to take

your family abroad again? That's the life that the president of this bank lives. Watchman, you and us ain't enemies. We're brothers. But your boss is the enemy of all of us. He gets hold of money and he locks it up in that safe to keep you and me from using it.

NIGHT WATCHMAN: I've thought of that myself.

CHIEF ROBBER: Put down your gun, brother. Join us. Some of the good things in this world are meant for you, the same as for your boss.

NIGHT WATCHMAN: Are you fellows on the square?

CHIEF ROBBER: Try us.

NIGHT WATCHMAN: If you're not, God help you! I'll shoot the first one of you that goes crooked. Hand over your guns first—butts forward. (*The Chief Robber and the First Robber do so.*)

SECOND ROBBER: I won't hand mine over.

CHIEF ROBBER: You fool! Hand it over.

NIGHT WATCHMAN (*Covering him*): Hand it over—butt first. (*To Chief Robber*): Shall I shoot, if he don't?

CHIEF ROBBER: Yes, shoot.

FIRST ROBBER: Hand ut over, pal, you fool! (*The Second Robber hands over his revolver.*)

CHIEF ROBBER: Now, let's hurry. Boys, on what condition do we take the Watchman in?

FIRST ROBBER: We'll give him fifty per cent. too—if that's satisfactory tuh me pal.

SECOND ROBBER: It is.

NIGHT WATCHMAN (*Laying all the revolvers within*

easy reach behind him): But how are you going to do it? I've got to pretend to protect the bank.

CHIEF ROBBER: That's easy. After we've got the money and given you your part, I'll lay you out a little—not much—so that when the cashier and the others look you over in the morning, you've got some blood to show that you made a stand.

NIGHT WATCHMAN: And when I'm laid out, you'll take the money out of my pockets—is that the idea?

CHIEF ROBBER: Oh, we wouldn't do a thing like that! That wouldn't be right.

NIGHT WATCHMAN: I couldn't have the money on me anyway. They would notice it.

SECOND ROBBER: We could takes ut tuh your woman.

NIGHT WATCHMAN: I ain't got no wife.

SECOND ROBBER: You ain't got no woman—as cheap as women is!

FIRST ROBBER: We could takes ut tuh your mother then.

NIGHT WATCHMAN: What explanation would you give her?

CHIEF ROBBER: Great God, boys, let's get to work! It'll soon be light.

NIGHT WATCHMAN: Have you got her open?

FIRST ROBBER: The hole's done drilled.

CHIEF ROBBER (*To Second Robber, appealingly*): Please fasten the fuse.

SECOND ROBBER: Why didn't you say ut that way the first time? (*He works rapidly with the dynamite stick and the fuse.*)

CHIEF ROBBER: We'll have to hurry, boys. I think it's getting light.

NIGHT WATCHMAN: Yes, it's getting light.

CHIEF ROBBER: Watchman, go to the window and see if any one is passing.

FIRST ROBBER: Give me the stick. (*In the light of the flash, he inserts the slender stick into the hole.*)

CHIEF ROBBER: Come on. (*All crawl away, with flashes on the floor.*) Any one passing?

NIGHT WATCHMAN (*At window*): No.

CHIEF ROBBER: Let her go.

(*A match strikes. A small flame crawls over the floor. A terrific explosion. And then the still night again.*)

NIGHT WATCHMAN: Good God! That noise—it was loud enough to raise the dead! I'll have to arrest you men to save myself.

CHIEF ROBBER: You couldn't hear it half a block away. You're not used to it. Remember the money! See anybody outside?

NIGHT WATCHMAN: No. But hurry up.

CHIEF ROBBER: It's all right, Watchman. Don't worry. All here? Anybody hurt?

FIRST ROBBER: I'm 'ere.

SECOND ROBBER: Me too.

(*They hasten to the safe and flash their lights upon it. The outer door lies on the floor.*)

FIRST ROBBER: It's got another door inside!

NIGHT WATCHMAN (*Still at window*): Hurry! It's getting light.

CHIEF ROBBER: Get busy with that drill on the inner door.

FIRST ROBBER: I ain't doin' all the drillin'!

NIGHT WATCHMAN: Hurry, boys. If the police come, I'll have to arrest you to save myself.

SECOND ROBBER: Gimme that drill. (*He begins to drill on the inner door. There is the rattle of an automobile.*)

CHIEF ROBBER: Lights out! Duck! (*The automobile passes on.*) Who was it?

NIGHT WATCHMAN (*Coming to the others*): I don't know. I couldn't tell. Hurry up.

CHIEF ROBBER: Look! The front door.

(*A flash-light appears in front, and some one outside tries the door.*)

SECOND ROBBER: We're cetched. You're tuh blame, Chief. The gang'll git you fer this.

NIGHT WATCHMAN: That's the Merchant Policeman. He's only paid to see if the front door is locked. As long as you didn't come in by that door he don't care. He's gone anyway. I tell you fellows it's getting light.

CHIEF ROBBER: Hurry up.

SECOND ROBBER: (*The buzz of the drill is heard again.*) She'll be t'ru in a minute. Got the stick ready?

FIRST ROBBER: Yes.

NIGHT WATCHMAN: Stop the drill. You can pry that inner door open. I'm sure you can.

FIRST ROBBER: Get away. (*The buzz ceases. He pries at the door.*)

CHIEF ROBBER (*Throwing his light on the door*): She's giving.

FIRST ROBBER: Take a hand on the jimmy, pal.

(Both pull on the bar. The door yields—flies open. All four turn their lights into the safe.)

CHIEF ROBBER: My God, men, look!

FIRST ROBBER: Piled up like bags of salt.

SECOND ROBBER: I'll hand ut out. *(He crawls inside and counting, hands out bag after bag, which the Chief Robber, also counting, stacks up before the opening.)*

NIGHT WATCHMAN: There's money enough to make us all comfortable for life.

FIRST ROBBER: Hurry up, pal, me hands is tremblin'.

SECOND ROBBER: That's all. *(He crawls out, and squats immediately in front of the revolvers lying on the floor.)*

CHIEF ROBBER: I'll divide them into four parts. The Night Watchman here, who represents the law, and me, your boss, your employer, will take half; and you two workers, take the other half.

SECOND ROBBER *(Menacingly)*: Take your hands off the swag! What has *you* done?

CHIEF ROBBER: I've managed this thing—haven't I?

FIRST ROBBER: You talked, that's all. I agrees wid me pal. You ain't done nothing.

CHIEF ROBBER: Didn't I persuade the Watchman here to join us? Didn't I show him the light, same as the big fellows do the police, and the courts? You two ought to be able to understand that.

NIGHT WATCHMAN: You surely made the thing clear to me. *(Impatiently)*: You fellows will have to hurry up. This ain't no time to quarrel.

SECOND ROBBER: Fer fixin' the Watchman we gives Talker a bag. (*He tosses him a bag.*) We gives a bag to the Watchman fer nothin'. (*He tosses him a bag.*) Me and me pal takes the rest.

CHIEF ROBBER: Nothing like that! (*Counting.*) Why, there are ten bags left.

NIGHT WATCHMAN: Each of you fellows promised me half—didn't you?

SECOND ROBBER: That ain't got nothin' tuh do wid ut. You gits a bag. Talker gits a bag. And me and me pal gits oney what's left.

CHIEF ROBBER: Nothing like that at all! I'll take the bags. (*He reaches for them.*)

SECOND ROBBER (*Covering him with revolver*): Git back!

CHIEF ROBBER (*Retreating*): Put that gun down. (*The Second Robber does so.*)

FIRST ROBBER: Watchman, what does you say about ut?

NIGHT WATCHMAN: I ain't got anything to do with the quarrel between them two. All I say is hurry up and give me my share.

SECOND ROBBER: We divides oney the way I said.

FIRST ROBBER: I agrees wid me pal—fifty-fifty.

(*Outside there is the sudden sputter of an automobile. It grows swiftly louder, then ceases suddenly in front of the bank. Instantly flash-lights appear at the windows and doors. At the safe all lights go out. There is scuffling. A loud cry is heard, and the noise of a body falling. Windows and doors are broken open by the persons outside, and several with flash-*

lights rush in. They turn on the electric lights. They are policemen.)

POLICEMAN (*At safe*): Here is one laid out.

ANOTHER POLICEMAN: They've got away.

ANOTHER POLICEMAN (*Coming from rear*): They're gone.

(Other Policemen, weapons in hand, hasten about and in and out.)

POLICEMAN (*At safe*): This fellow looks finished.

(A man in civilian clothes rushes in.)

THE MAN: My God, the money! I'm the cashier here.

POLICEMAN (*At safe*): I don't think they got away with it. Here it is.

THE MAN: I put twelve bags in the safe this afternoon. *(He counts them.)* Not a bag gone. Oh, I'm glad of that! I heard the crash.

POLICEMAN: Are you the one that notified headquarters?

THE MAN: Yes.

POLICEMAN: You didn't tell the Desk Sergeant it was the bank.

THE MAN: I did but he couldn't seem to understand me. I was excited, I guess.

POLICEMAN: This one got laid out.

THE MAN: That's not a burglar. That's the Night Watchman. Poor fellow! I'm sure he did his duty.

(The Night Watchman lifts himself a little, but sinks back again. The Man rolls him over, face against the wall and puts some books under his head

to make him more comfortable, meanwhile whispering tender words.)

THE MAN: Officer, we can't leave this money here. The safe is done up. Hadn't we better take it to headquarters?

POLICEMAN: Yes.

THE MAN: Will you have the men carry it out to the car?

POLICEMAN (*Beckoning two other policemen, who come to him*): Carry these out to the car. (*They begin to do so.*)

THE MAN: Officer, I can't tell you how glad I am you've saved the money.

POLICEMAN: Sure.

THE MAN: Why—some of that money belongs to wash'women.

POLICEMAN: Think the Watchman is hurt much?

THE MAN: Can't tell. He was struck on the head. He may be out of his head for a while when he comes to—say crazy things. They usually do—don't they?

POLICEMAN: You want any of these books and papers in the safe taken along?

THE MAN: No. That stuff is all right here. (*The policemen are carrying out the last bags.*) Is the driver out there in the car?

POLICEMAN: Yes.

(The Man goes out. The engine of the car begins to sputter. The sound grows a little fainter, then ceases suddenly.)

POLICEMAN: The car has stopped.

(A sharp report is heard, and immediately the noise

of the engine begins again, and diminishes rapidly in the distance.)

POLICEMAN: Blow out?

ANOTHER POLICEMAN: No. The car had stopped.

POLICEMAN: Back-fire maybe.

ANOTHER POLICEMAN: Not that sound. Something's wrong.

NIGHT WATCHMAN (*Turning*): Is he gone?

POLICEMAN: Yes.

NIGHT WATCHMAN: You remember he rolled me over?—

POLICEMAN: Yes.

NIGHT WATCHMAN: And put some things under my head?—

POLICEMAN: Yes, yes!

NIGHT WATCHMAN: He whispered he would kill me if I moved.

POLICEMAN: The cashier?

NIGHT WATCHMAN: That ain't the cashier. That's the Chief Robber.

(Consternation.)

CURTAIN

THE DRYAD AND THE DEACON

A FAERIE IN ONE SCENE

By

WILLIAM O. BATES

WILLIAM O. BATES

William Oscar Bates is a resident of Indianapolis, Indiana. After receiving his Ph. B. from Cornell University he was engaged for over twenty years in newspaper work in Indianapolis, St. Paul and New York.

In later years Mr. Bates has divided his time among his real estate interests, trade journalism, and play-writing. He is the author of *Recitations and How to Recite*; *Our Foreign Correspondent*, a four-act comedy produced in St. Paul; *The Black Bokhara*, a one-act comedy; and *Polly of Pogue's Run*, *Asaph*, and *Tea*, all produced in Indianapolis.

Mr. Bates was instrumental in establishing the Little Theatre Society of Indiana, and was its first secretary. He is an enthusiastic worker in the Little Theatre of Indianapolis, where several of his plays have been produced.

The Indianapolis Centennial Pageant produced in 1920 is one of the finest of Mr. Bates' works, and has given him wide and very favorable recognition in his own city. The production of this pageant was one of the most notable artistic achievements in the city of Indianapolis.

THE DRYAD AND THE DEACON

Not every playwright can portray a dryad; Mr. Bates has done it here with exquisite delicacy and lightness of touch.

"The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers."

When do we take time to think and *wonder*? Are there no fairy creatures in bird and bush and tree? We cold, prosaic mortals have eyes that see not and ears that hear not. But Deacon Shadrach learned, and so may we.

"Come and trip it as you go
On the light fantastic toe."

(Copyrighted. Applications to produce *The Dryad and the Deacon* should be addressed to William O. Bates, 756 Middle Drive, Woodruff Place, Indianapolis, Indiana.)

THE DRYAD AND THE DEACON

A huge and venerable oak tree stands in the center of a wooded glade of New England. In front of the tree a little to the right is a large boulder. It is summer, about 1640.

(DEACON SHADRACH SNOW comes in from the left. He is a young man of austere countenance and wears the conventional Puritan dress, steeple-crown hat, cropped hair, and the like. Under one arm he carries a copy of the Bay Psalm Book, and on his shoulder is a large ax. He advances to the tree, inspects its size, walking backward and around it, as though calculating its timber possibilities. Then, apparently satisfied he lays the ax down at its roots, goes to the boulder and, depositing his book thereon, proceeds to take off his coat and roll up his shirt-sleeves. He then, taking up the ax, seems about to begin chopping on the tree. But, as if remembering a forgotten task, he returns to the boulder, seats himself upon it, opens the psalm book and finding the page, "lines off" in a high, nasal voice the following psalm—marking the time with his hand, as though in rehearsal for his Sunday service:)

"The riyers on of Babilon
there when we did sit down;
Yet even then wee mourned, when
wee remembered Sion.
Our harps we did hang it amid,
upon the willow tree,

Because there they that us away
 led in captivitee,
Requir'd of us a song, thus
 askt mirth: us waste who laid,
Sing us among a Sion's song,
 unto us then they said."

(As he concludes, a strain of soft, elfin music is heard. He looks around in surprise, then dismissing the matter, turns the pages of his book and again begins to intone:)

"Lift up thy foot on hye,
Unto the desolations
 of perpetuity:—"

(He is again interrupted, this time by a tinkling as of many small bells, followed by a peal of girlish laughter. He starts to his feet in wonder as a door in front of the oak tree gently opens and the smiling face of The Dryad peeps forth. She is dressed in robes of thin, clinging green and amber and wears upon her head a chaplet of flowers. There are tiny bells upon her arms and feet. She nods him a greeting.)

DEACON: Wherefore, maiden, this strange hiding-place?

(She puts her finger to her lips in token that she must not tell, steps down from the tree, closing the bark door behind her, dances a few steps toward him and makes him a mocking courtesy.)

DEACON *(Turning away in shocked reproof)*: And, forsooth, wherefore this unseemly attire?

(She dances around until in front of him once more, at which he quickly turns again, when she circles and

confronts him from the other side. He hides his eyes with his hand and speaks with anger.)

DEACON: Avaunt! I know thee now! Thou art a witch—sent by Mistress Holbrook to cast a spell upon me! But Deacon Shadrach Snow fears not the Powers of Darkness. Go away!

(She tickles his nose with her chaplet, making him sneeze, whereat she laughs gleefully.)

DEACON *(Catching up his book and opening the pages toward her)*: I know to drive thee hence. This book of holy psalms, newly imprinted, shall exorcise thee, witch!

(She catches the book away from him and dances gaily off around the tree, turning the pages as she goes. He hurries in pursuit. She eludes him and finally tosses him the book which he presses to his bosom.)

DEACON: Truly thou art a malignant of deep guile and subtlety. I will e'en try what a psalm-reading may do to curb thy vain demeanor. *(He hurriedly finds the right page and begins to intone as before.)*

“Lift up thy foot on hye,
Unto the desolations
of perpetuity:—”

(Upon this injunction, she does lift her foot on high—whereat he breaks off to rebuke her.)

DEACON: Oh, shameless mocker of the sacred text! I will shut thee from my sight. *(He holds the book before him to carry out this plan, and begins again:)*

“Lift up thy foot on hye,—”

(This time she lifts her foot high enough to kick the book out of his hand.)

DEACON: Truly, the Psalmist must have had thee in mind in writing this holy song. Thou shalt hear what he says of thee! *(He retakes the book, and seating himself upon the boulder with his back toward her, intones with angry zeal the following:)*

“Lift up thy foot on hye,
Unto the desolations
of perpetuity:
Thy foe within the Sanctuary,
hath done all lewd designs.
Amid the Church thy foes doe roare:
their Banners set for signes.”

(She again starts to lift up her foot, but seeing it will not be noticed, she tiptoes up to him and peers over his shoulder at the book. At the concluding line she claps her chaplet upon his head and dances around to confront him, again lifting her pertinacious foot. He snatches the wreath from his head and throws it upon the ground.)

DEACON: The psalm fits thee truly, witch. Thy foot is ever lifted high, thy lewd designs are shown, thy tinkling bells do roar and *(pointing to wreath)* thou fain wouldst set thy banner sign upon me. It shall not be! Think not because my name is Snow that I am to be melted by thy allurements—I am also called Shadrach! I will look no more upon thee! *(He seats himself anew, bows his head over the book and with time-beating hand seems to bury himself in silent rehearsal of his task.)*

(The Dryad retrieves her wreath, pantomimes her scorn of his stoicism, and dances gaily off to lilting music, as though dismissing him from her mind. In doing so she comes upon the ax at the foot of the tree. She examines it, at first with careless curiosity, then with growing concern, as she looks up at her tree and at The Deacon. Finally the full significance of its meaning comes upon her and—with a crash of the music—she falls at the tree base, clasping its roots with outspread arms. The music changes to express her grief and alarm. Slowly she rises and, with deep dejection, drags herself to The Deacon's feet where she kneels and touches him timidly to attract his attention. The music here becomes low and plaintive.)

DEACON *(Shaking his head with determination)*: No, I will heed thee not. Begone—I have work to do!

(She again touches him supplicatingly; when he looks up she places her wreath before him and, with clasped and extended hands, abases her head to his feet.)

DEACON: Oh, thou persistent fiend, what wouldst thou? Is this lowly mien but some new trap for my soul?

(Lifting herself she points to the ax with agonized inquiry.)

DEACON: Yea, that is my ax—but I thought not to strike thee with it. Thy punishment be upon other hands than mine. *(The music stops.)*

(She shakes her head in token that he has mistaken her meaning, and rising seems to supplicate him to go with her. In wondering reluctance, he slowly rises and follows her to the tree. Here she points first at

the ax and then at the tree with anxious inquiry. At last he understands.)

DEACON: Yea, verily, I do purpose to hew down this oak tree for the joiners, and thy shameful antics but hinder me from this work.

(She clasps her arms about the tree; then falls upon her knees and lifts up her joined hands to him in supplication.)

DEACON: Aha, now, indeed, I do know thee! Thou art no common witch—but one of that old heathen crew they called Dryads. And this tree is thy dwelling-place? *(She nods assent.)* I thought all such were long since gone away. Hast thou not shame to harbor in a Christian land who art of Greece three thousand years ago? *(She hangs her head as he looks up at the venerable tree.)* And yet thou must have been here long before *we* came? *(She nods eager assent.)* Perhaps even before the red Indian? *(She nods “yes.”)* Thou seemest very young to be so old! *(She points up at the tree, then to herself.)* Yea, maiden, I do understand—thy oak reneweth his greenery every spring and thy own youth therewith? *(She rewards him with a dazzling smile.)* And when the ax is laid at the root of thy tree, thou diest also—so, methinks, runs the pagan legend? *(Crossing her hands upon her breast, she slowly sinks to her knees before him and bows her head in assent.)* Nay, have no fear—I find it not in my heart to harm thy tree or thee! *(She kisses his hand in gratitude.)* Moreover, maiden, I would fain save thee from the fate that sometime must befall thy earth-born tree. Come away from they heathen life and practices to

yonder Christian settlement where thou may'st learn the ways that lead to life perpetual, a life beyond the perils and poor satisfactions of this vain world, eternal in the Heavens! There thou may'st be put to school, and be given seemly and modest raiment, have the admonition and example of pious women, the ministrations of the Church, and—who knows?—in time thou might'st even be thought worthy to become the wedded wife of some grave and godly man!

(The Dryad listens to this exhortation, at first with puzzled wonder, then with demure deference, finally with elfin glee. She bursts into a peal of mocking laughter, springs to her feet and, to madly vivid music, goes careening about in wildly exuberant rejection of The Deacon's program, catching up his hat and setting it aslant upon her own head as she whirls

(He watches her a few moments in sorrowful astonishment, then goes slowly back to the boulder where he proceeds to put on his coat and retake his book. Noting his preparation to depart, she takes his hat in her extended hands and, pirouetting across, offers it to him with mischievous meekness. The music stops.)

DEACON: Alas, thou poor, vain butterfly, it doth grieve me sorely to see thee so light-minded when thou might'st hope for a sanctified soul in that fair body of thine! *(She crosses her hands upon her breast and bows demurely.)* Shall I ever see thee more? *(She thinks a moment, then slowly shakes her head.)* I fear me that is well, for the banns have been asked that I should wed a devout young woman, and though her name be Patience, she might misin-

terpret my zeal for thy conversion—and she lacketh thy slowness of speech. (*She gives him a look of arch inquiry.*) But it can not harm her—or thee—that thou shouldst receive my blessing before we part. Kneel, maiden! (*She does so and he places his hands upon her head in solemn invocation.*) May the Lord bless thee, and keep thee, and make His face to shine upon thee, and give thee peace! Amen! Now go thy ways and I will go mine!

(*The Dryad rises slowly and recoils from him a few steps, with a look of wide-eyed wonder, as though dimly comprehending the meaning of his words. Then, suddenly coming to herself, with whirling arms and fast-flying feet, she breaks into a bacchanalian dance, wheeling in frenzied circles to wildly joyous music until she finds herself in front of her tree. The music breaks off abruptly; the door opens behind her; she steps backward into the tree, and, with a last, lingering smile upon The Deacon, the door shuts her from his sight.*

(*He picks up his hat and book and goes, very slowly, to the tree. Here he stands a moment, his back to the audience, then falls prone upon the ground, clasping the tree roots in his arms, his shoulders heaving with convulsive sobs. A faint and far-away tinkling of tiny bells is heard as the curtain gently closes down.*)

IN THE LIGHT OF THE MANGER

A PROPHETIC FANTASY IN ONE ACT

By

WILLIAM O. BATES

IN THE LIGHT OF THE MANGER

In the Light of the Manger illustrates what the one-act play can do in the way of creating that illusive, artful something called emotional atmosphere. The author relies upon the dialogue alone for effect. This often consists of only brief questions, answers and exclamations, but foreboding, fear, wonder and mystery are subtly suggested by this elliptical form.

(Copyrighted. Application to produce *In the Light of the Manger* should be addressed to William O. Bates, 756 Middle Drive, Woodruff Place, Indianapolis, Indiana.)

IN THE LIGHT OF THE MANGER

THOSE REPRESENTED:

A MOTHER

A DAUGHTER

A SON

A BABE

A ROMAN SOLDIER

The interior of a humble Bethlehem home in the days of Herod the King discloses at the right a compartment for cattle, the demi-arch over it surmounted by steps leading to an upper room concealed behind dark curtains, its floor, showing a narrow platform in front of the curtains, being some five feet above the level of the apartment. The outer entrance, made of rude boards, gives into the place for cattle, and opposite this door is a manger which now serves as a bed for a sleeping infant. There is a primitive dais at the left upon which are bedclothes. Dried fruits are suspended from rough rafters, also a hanging lamp lighting the night but dimly. All the appointments and costumes are archaic.

The Mother and the Daughter, a girl of sixteen, are seated opposite each other on the floor at the right, grinding at a handmill and crooning a mournful lullaby.

MOTHER (*Pausing and glancing toward the manger*): How soundly he sleeps! It does not seem quite natural.

DAUGHTER: Nay, mother, he is always quiet.

MOTHER: Yes, I know. Both you and brother were restless, but he is different.

DAUGHTER (*Rising*): Should he not be different, he who was born on the same night with the Blessed Child?

MOTHER: Speak not of that, beloved! At times I almost wish it had not been so—it seems too much honor.

DAUGHTER: But brother was with the shepherds on that wonderful night and heard the Wise Men say no harm can come to any who then saw His face.

MOTHER: How could the Wise Men know that?

DAUGHTER: How should they have seen His star in the East and how escaped the wiles of Herod? God spoke to them in dreams and they understood.

MOTHER: I hope it may be so but I am glad brother sleeps in the upper room to-night. I am strangely ill at ease.

DAUGHTER: Confess, now! You are still thinking of that wild story, King Herod seeks to slay the Blessed Child?

MOTHER: Yea, daughter. Herod is a hard and cruel king. I do fear him.

DAUGHTER: But only a monster would order all the babes slain because of one. And what should a great king dread from a little child?

MOTHER: Herod's family came from Edom, of a race suspicious and revengeful, like their forefather Esau. Did he not kill his benefactor, Hyrcanus, and his own beautiful wife, Mariamne, and three of his own sons. (*Lowering her voice.*) And now, when he is grown old, our neighbor tells me he has ordered

that all the nobles shall die when he dies that there may be mourning in the land because of him.

DAUGHTER: Yet he built the magnificent temple at Jerusalem, and has given the land many other great buildings and splendid new cities.

MOTHER: And the land is full of hatred and fear of a king who cringes to Rome and rules Judea with a scepter dipped in blood.

DAUGHTER: Yes, I know, and yet—(*She listens.*) Did you now hear him stir?

MOTHER: Go and see whether he awakens! (*The girl goes to the manger, rearranges the infant's covering and kisses him lightly.*)

DAUGHTER (*Returning*): He sleeps as sweetly as though guarded by legions of angels.

(*The sound of a trumpet, faint and far away, is heard. Mother and daughter look at each other startled and speak in terrified whispers.*)

MOTHER (*Rising*): What was that?

DAUGHTER: It sounded like a trumpet.

MOTHER: It was a trumpet—soldiers abroad at night! Call brother! He will go and see.

DAUGHTER: But, mother, he must replace father in the fields at midnight and needs his rest. Let me go!

MOTHER: Hasten, then, but return quickly! (*The girl swiftly covers herself with a dark cloak and darts out, while the mother goes to the manger and taking the sleeping babe in her arms hurries to the foot of the steps over the arch just as the son, a youth of seventeen, parts the curtains of the upper room and steps out in front of them.*)

MOTHER (*Speaking in a whisper*): Did you hear it—the trumpet?

SON: No, mother, I heard no trumpet, but a trumpet call is no cause for alarm. It is near the hour when they change guards.

MOTHER: But you know they say Herod means to kill all Bethlehem babes to make sure he slays the Son of Joseph and Mary.

SON: And shall not the Son of Joseph and Mary protect His own? Mother, mother, do you fear Herod more than you believe in God?

MOTHER: Alas, I believe in God when I can—and fear Herod when I must.

SON (*Descending the steps and caressing the babe*): Shall He who chose a human mother forget how human mothers yearn?

MOTHER: You feel quite sure no harm can come to our beloved?

SON: Mother, I will not fear for this precious little brother, born on the selfsame night when I heard the angel say, "Fear not!" and with my own eyes saw the New-born over whom the skies sang "Peace on earth."

DAUGHTER (*Rushing in, breathless and gasping in terror*): The soldiers are coming—their dreadful work has begun!

MOTHER (*Starting toward the door*): We must flee to the caves.

DAUGHTER: Too late—they are already in the street—I heard the cry of our neighbor's child!

MOTHER (*Falling upon her knees*): Oh, what shall we do—where shall we go?

SON: Go into the upper room! I will meet them.

MOTHER: But you have no weapon. They will kill you, too!

SON: "Fear not!" (*He lifts his mother to her feet as she hurries up the steps with the babe and disappears behind the curtains just as there sounds a loud trumpet note and a tumult of clashing arms without. The son silently urges his sister to follow her mother up the stairs, and she tries to obey but is so overcome with terror that she staggers and makes but slow ascent. There is an imperious knock upon the door which, a moment later, is thrown open by a burly Roman soldier in glittering armor, a blood-stained sword suspended about his neck. He enters in time to see the girl pass behind the curtains.*)

SOLDIER: Is there a babe in this house?

SON: You see.

SOLDIER (*Starting toward the steps*): I will see.

SON (*Quietly interposing*): Wherefore?

SOLDIER: It is Herod's order all Bethlehem babes shall be slain.

SON: Again, wherefore?

SOLDIER: I know not—nor care. Some say certain soothsayers have told him one has been born here who shall be king of the Jews. He is king of the Jews.

SON: That was spoken of the Son of Joseph and Mary. But they have taken Him away to Egypt. Besides these Wise Men, whom you call soothsayers, said two thousand years must pass before the Jews again govern in Judea.

SOLDIER: It may be so. I am not here to judge but to execute judgment.

SON: But when your time comes to be judged, think you God will forgive you the murder of the innocent because you did the will of Herod?

SOLDIER: He speaks for the gods—let him answer to them!

SON: Can any god desire the blood of babes?

SOLDIER: Let those who anger and oppose Herod beware when the innocent suffer. If he is terrible to those who have done no wrong, how much more should they fear him who have thwarted his will!

SON: But when the Son of Joseph and Mary was born I heard the angels sing, "Peace on earth—good will to men." What has Herod to fear from one who brings peace and good will?

SOLDIER: I know naught of angels. My business is war—not peace.

SON: The Wise Men said also there would be no need of legions or war chariots to uphold the new kingdom—that the great God would be its supporter and shield.

SOLDIER: The gods of Rome are gods of war, and fight ever on the side of the strongest legions.

SON: Have you not read in the Song of Deborah that "the stars in their courses fought against Sisera"?

SOLDIER: What have I to do with your Deborah and your Sisera?

SON: This, soldier! Because Sisera's king was like your king, and every other ruler who trusts in force alone. He had nine hundred chariots of iron and he mightily oppressed the children of Israel, until

they shunned the highways and forsook their villages, and in war he divided the spoil; to every man a damsel or two, and to Sisera a prey of divers colors. But Deborah spoke to Barak: "Arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive!" and Sisera was overthrown and died by the treachery of a woman he thought to have made a traitor. Let all who trust in blood and iron and treachery remember Jael who smote her tent nail into Sisera's temples!

SOLDIER: Have done with your Hebrew romances! (*Two short trumpet blasts sound without.*) You hear—they call me! Out of my way—I must do my work!

SON: One moment, more, I beseech you! Have you no child of your own?

SOLDIER: I have a son, but if Herod called for his head my own would have to answer for it.

SON: Soldier, would you not fall upon your own sword rather than turn its edge against your son?

SOLDIER: By Jupiter, boy, you should yourself feel my sword's edge for that stroke.

SON: Let it fall upon me, then, rather than upon this helpless babe!

SOLDIER: Fool, your death would not save its life. (*Three short trumpet blasts are heard.*) Stand aside, lest you die in vain!

SON (*Boldly*): Not yet! The Wise Men, whose report Herod heeds, said yet more. They said no harm could come to the Holy Child or to any who had looked upon His face that first night—that all such would be protected by the God who declared, "My sword shall be bathed in Heaven; behold, it shall

come down upon Edom and upon the people of my curse to judgment." Herod is of Edom—let him and you who serve him dread the sword of the King of Kings!

SOLDIER: (*Wresting his sword from his neck and whirling the boy out of his path*): Confide you in your Wise Men and the sword of your "King of Kings!" My reliance shall be this good sword of Herod. (*The soldier starts up the steps of the arch. There comes a crash of thunder and the light goes out suddenly.* Then through the curtain is seen rank rising upon rank, a pyramid of white-robed angels with uplifted swords above the mother kneeling with the babe in her arms. The swords sink in unison until they point at the soldier's breast. He reels and falls backward, his sword clanging to the floor. An invisible chorus sings, "Peace on earth," while the vision gradually fades away and the front light returns.)

SOLDIER (*Staggering to his feet*): Lead me forth! My eyesight is gone. (*The boy leads him out. A moment later the trumpet again sounds, and the boy returns as the mother and daughter come out upon the platform. All fall upon their knees in thanksgiving while faint and far away the invisible chorus again is heard.*)

CURTAIN

PHOEBE LOUISE

A ONE-ACT PLAY

By

BERNARD SOBEL

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Bernard Sobel received his B. S. from Purdue University, his Ph. B. from the University of Chicago, and his M. A. from Wisconsin University. He was formerly Assistant-Professor of English at Purdue University; also Lecturer on Modern Drama for Indiana University. He is now a member of the Faculty of the College of the City of New York. Mr. Sobel has specialized in publicity and was Director of Opportunities, in charge of all western publicity for the Professional Division of the United States Employment Service. He is now Press Representative for Earl Carroll and the Earl Carroll Theatre, New York City.

Mr. Sobel's printed writings include "How Do They Do It," *Photoplay Magazine*, "The School-Teacher in Literature," *Educational Issues*, (reprinted in *The Literary Digest*); "What's Wrong With the Movies," "Actors Who Are Hidden," "The English Players," "Publicity and The Truth," "A Constellation of Stars," *The Theatre Magazine*; "Sam H. Harris and the Three T's," "Child Actors," *Success Magazine*; "The Little Theatre in the West," *Christian Science Monitor*; "A Census of Desserts," "Side-lines of a Bootblack," "Living Images," "Curtain Calls and Curtain Speeches," *New York Tribune Sunday Magazine*; "We Can Dance," "The Stage Mother," "The Stage Door Man," *Dramatic Mirror*; "The Green Room," *Pantomime*; "The Civil Engineer," *The Road*

Maker; "The Earl Carroll Theatre," *Arts and Decorations*; "The Right to Life in Modern Drama," *South Atlantic Quarterly*; "Puffing the Piano," *Cartoons*; "The Immortal" (with Carl Glick), a one-act play, *Poet Lore*; "Before and After," a one-act play, *The White Way*; "Pageant Possibilities," *Mississippi Valley Historical Quarterly*. Book reviews and dramatic criticism for *The Dial*, *The Theatre*, *The Spotlight*, *The Electrical World*, etc., *Phoebe Louise*, produced by the Indianapolis Little Theatre; *The Spider Web*, produced by the Hull House Players, *Cheer Up* and *There's Always a Reason*, one-act plays produced by the English Players, Purdue University.

PHOEBE LOUISE

This play is distinctly modern in theme. The Burkes are all interesting studies: Julius and Mamie are representative of the shrewd Yankee one often meets. Lydia "sets off" her elders clearly, possessing an appalling combination of her parents' characteristics as well as some distinctive traits of her own. Her disconcerting questions are responsible for much of the humor of the play.

(Copyrighted. Applications to produce *Phoebe Louise* should be addressed to Professor Sobel, the Lyric Theatre, Forty-Second Street, near Broadway, New York City.)

PHOEBE LOUISE

CHARACTERS

JULIUS BURKE.

MAMIE BURKE, his wife.

LYDIA, their eight-year-old child.

A Girl nineteen years of age.

SCENE: *A luxurious living-room in the Burke home. Everything is of the best. There is a general atmosphere of comfort and convenience. There is a door at the rear of the room (left) which leads to the street and a door at the right which leads to Lydia's bedroom. Mrs. Burke is crocheting. Lydia is playing with her dolls at the center of the stage. Mr. Burke, in an easy chair (right), is reading the newspaper. He wears slippers. His coat is hanging on the back of his chair. The gold watch chain hanging across his vest is very prominent. At the left of the center is a table, with books, a lamp and a desk telephone. As the curtain rises, Lydia is talking.*

LYDIA: Oh, mother.

(Mamie, disregarding her, continues with her work.)

LYDIA (Throwing her dolls aside): Mother, I want to ask you something.

MAMIE (*Finally*): Well, what is it? Do you really have to ask this question? Is it so important that you have to disturb me?

LYDIA: Yes. It's very important.

MAMIE: Then, let's hear it right away and get it over. What is it, Lydia?

LYDIA: Please tell me the exact time.

MAMIE (*Glancing at her watch*): It is now a quarter of eight.

LYDIA: Then how much longer will we have to wait for Phoebe Louise?

MAMIE: About ten minutes, if the train is on time.

LYDIA: And if the train is late, how long will we have to wait?

MAMIE: That depends.

LYDIA: Depends on how late the train will be?

MAMIE: Exactly.

LYDIA: Do you think the train will be late?

MAMIE: I don't know, Lydia. How can I tell?

LYDIA: But can't you even guess?

JULIUS (*Exasperated, and throwing aside his paper*): No, she can't, Lydia, and I wish that you would stop a few of those senseless questions so that I could read the paper. There's a story here about a shrewd woman thief; she's been going around town—

MAMIE: Yes, I know, but you don't have to be so cross with the child, Julius. It is only natural that she would be interested in a cousin whom she has never seen.

JULIUS: Well, it's not Lydia I'm cross with,—exactly. It's Judge Henry Blocker.

MAMIE: What has the judge done now?

JULIUS: Oh, nothing. But I just want to say that if we should lose a thousand dollars, we can blame it on that old fossil.

MAMIE: A thousand dollars! Why, how could Judge Blocker cause you—

JULIUS: Oh, nothing. It's a matter of business; you couldn't understand. (*He takes up his paper again.*) Now, Lydia, my child, be a good little girl.

LYDIA: I will, father. But I wish that Phoebe would come. I'm dying to see her. (*She is silent for a moment, then runs over to her mother.*) Mother, what do you think Phoebe Louise will be like? Are cousins like other relatives? Father told me that—

MAMIE: What did your father tell you?

LYDIA: He said that she would—

MAMIE: Your father doesn't know any more about her than I do and I only know her by name. He never saw her. He never saw her mother, and he hasn't seen her father in more than twenty-one years. I wish that we did know more about her. This idea of bringing a complete stranger to live with us has completely upset me. We'll have to change our whole method of living.

LYDIA: Will we have dessert every day?

MAMIE: Heavens, no! Dessert is an extravagance, and you know what your father thinks about extravagance.

LYDIA: Yes, but you have dessert when we have company and Phoebe Louise will be company.

MAMIE: No, she won't, and the sooner she learns that the better. She won't be company because she's

a relative. But that doesn't mean that we won't be good to her. Remember that, Lydia, we must be very good to her and love her.

JULIUS (*Throwing down his paper*): Yes, indeed, we must. We must love her and treat her the best way we know how. She's my brother's only child and my only living relative and I want to show her how much I think of her (*taking out his watch*.) I wish that she were here now so that I could tell her how welcome she is.

MAMIE: You're mighty generous, Julius.

JULIUS: I can afford to be. I'm well-to-do,—successful. I want to live and let live. And I want her to know how I feel,—at once. First impressions are the strongest.

MAMIE: We always do our part by those who need help, don't we.

JULIUS: We believe in dividing, of course, but this is a special case. Phoebe Louise belongs to our own family. We must make a special effort from the very moment she reaches here. I don't want her to feel lonesome or unhappy a second. As soon as she comes make a fuss over her. Don't let her feel strange. Make her feel perfectly at home. Lydia, you run up to her and kiss her, and, Mamie, you and I will do the same.

MAMIE: What if she should say that—

JULIUS: Don't give her a chance to say anything. Just welcome her. Take her things. Give her the easy chair and make her happy. If she's not too tired after traveling we'll devise some means of entertainment.

MAMIE: That sounds a little extravagant, dear.

JULIUS: Never mind. This once we'll do things handsomely.

LYDIA (*Dancing around*): Goody, goody, we'll have a dessert every day!

MAMIE: Hush, child. Don't be silly. To hear her talk, a person would think that she didn't have all she wants. Don't you think, Julius, that you had better put on your coat and shoes?

JULIUS: No, indeed. There's no need being formal with one's relative. Now, Lydia, you won't forget to do that— (*The bell rings.*) There she is now. (*They rush to the door and open it, all talking at once. They scarcely give the new arrival a chance to pass, so demonstrative are they in their welcome. She carries a suit-case and looks tired. Lydia, true to directions, has thrown her arms around her and kissed her and, while the others salute her, she talks and hugs her. Meanwhile, by degrees, they get her seated and slowly relieve her of her hat, coat and bag. All talk at one time.*)

MAMIE: Now we want you to feel perfectly at home. Perfectly. And be sure to do just as you wish and, and—

LYDIA: And we're going to have dessert every day, every single day. Aren't we, mother?

MAMIE: Of course we will, Lydia; that is, if Phoebe cares enough about sweets to have them every day. Now take her hat, Lydia, and put it where it belongs and then take her furs, and don't let them drag on the floor. That's it. Now, Phoebe, as I said we want you to feel perfectly at home.

JULIUS (*Rubbing his hands, characteristically*): Yes, Phoebe Louise, you are my brother's only child and my only living kin and I want to do the right thing by you,—handsomely. It's twenty years since I've seen your father.

LYDIA (*Interrupting*): Why, father, you said twenty-one, before.

JULIUS: That's right. It's twenty-one years since I've seen your father and I've never seen you at all. But I want to say that I would have known you in a minute. You are the very image of him. Every gesture, every movement, is just like his were.

LYDIA: How can you remember so well, father?

JULIUS: One doesn't forget one's brothers, my child; that is (*embarrassed*), one doesn't forget, at least, what they look like. It seems like a day since we were together. We quarreled over a matter of business. I don't wish to speak ill of the dead, but he was in the wrong.

MAMIE: Julius! How can you?

JULIUS: I beg your pardon, Phoebe Louise, I meant no offense. You see our difficulty grew out of a matter of money. I was managing the business as I saw fit and doing well too, but he wouldn't cooperate; so we parted. I kept the business and have been rather successful, but he failed to prosper.

LYDIA: I thought you said he was poor, daddy.

JULIUS: He was. That's what "failed to prosper" means, my child. I have always (*explaining*) believed in taking time to explain a new term to a child. Well, as I said, let the dead past bury its dead. It will be our pleasant duty now to look after you.

Mama (*to Mamie*), what entertainment have you provided for our niece? What are we going to do this evening?

LYDIA: Can I go 'long?

JULIUS: We haven't decided yet where we are going. Besides little children are not expected to go out after dinner. What are your plans, mama?

MAMIE: I thought that we would go to the theatre or to the roof garden, but (*as the girl seems about to protest*) she looks tired, don't you think? (*Goes over to her and caresses her.*) I'm afraid you are too tired to dress up for the roof garden after your long trip. Traveling tires me too, unless I take a chair car, and though a chair car is an extravagance, I always take one to avoid getting a headache.

JULIUS: But, Mamie, you're not answering my question. If we're not going to the roof garden, we could go to the theatre. She wouldn't have to dress up much to go to the Alhambra.

MAMIE: All right, dear, call up for the seats. (*Julius starts for the telephone.*)

LYDIA: But, papa, you can't go to the Alhambra.

JULIUS: Why not, Lydia?

LYDIA: Because—

JULIUS (*Impatiently*): Yes?

LYDIA: You said—

JULIUS: Well, what is it?

LYDIA: But, papa—

JULIUS: Yes. Hurry up. Why can't I go there?

LYDIA: When you called them up this afternoon, you said that they had only parquet seats.

JULIUS: Yes, yes (*embarrassed*). But what of

that, Lydia? Hurry up, dear, so that I can call up.

LYDIA (*Elaborately*): Well, you said that you wouldn't go in parquet seats because they are an extravagance.

JULIUS: By George, that's right. I was unable to get seats when I called up before. I had forgotten completely. Why didn't you remind me, Mamie?

MAMIE: I should think that you would be able to remember yourself whether you had called up or not. You know I'm not responsible for everything. It wasn't my plan to go to the theatre.

JULIUS: That's right. I'm in the wrong again. I'm always in the wrong.

MAMIE: I didn't say that. What I said was—

LYDIA: Mama.

MAMIE: What now, Lydia?

LYDIA: If you are not going to the theatre and you're not going to the roof garden, where are you going? How are you going to entertain Cousin Phoebe Louise?

MAMIE: We might go riding in the machine. I think that would rest her and do us all good. What do you think of that, Julius?

JULIUS: Excellent, dear. But I'm sorry that Jones has made other arrangements. It's his night off, you know, and he has put up the machine.

LYDIA: Can't you drive, daddy? Please drive and take me along.

JULIUS: Daddy's tired, Lydia, and besides, with gasoline where it is these days, I feel that night driving is really an extravagance.

LYDIA: Oh, dear, oh, dear, I can't do anything.
(*She begins to cry and they strive to comfort her.*)

JULIUS: There, there, baby. Don't cry. If you stop, we'll get you some ice-cream, a great big dish.

LYDIA (*She stops crying*): May I have chocolate?

JULIUS: Certainly. What will you have, mama?

MAMIE: None for me, thanks. You know it doesn't seem to be agreeing with me lately. But order some for the rest. I'm sure that will refresh Phoebe Louise.

JULIUS: No, Mamie, we won't do that. If you don't care for any, we won't take any. To-morrow, though, we'll take Lydia down-town and buy her a great big hot chocolate fudge, instead. How would you like that, dear? (*Lydia dances, then she takes his hand and they dance together. Mamie sings and keeps time with her hands.*)

JULIUS: (*As he wipes his forehead*): I tell you, there's no place like home. I think we'll just stay home to-night and have a nice family talk. You, Mamie, I want to give a deep consideration to Phoebe Louise's affairs, and the present is just as good a time as any.

MAMIE: Who was that marriageable Mr. Lemuel you were talking about, Julius?

LYDIA: I thought you said he had something the matter with his foot.

JULIUS: I did indeed, but that's merely temporary. He's a very pleasant fellow, I tell you. Perhaps we'll be able to have him down soon. In the meanwhile,—

MAMIE: In the meanwhile—

JULIUS: Yes, in the meanwhile she must be provided for,—provided for; that is, in some way. I know (*to the girl*) you are too independent to want to live off your relatives. Yes, (*continuing without giving her a chance to respond*) I know that you are too much like your father to want to be dependent. I can see that in every feature. Your eyes are just exactly like his.

MAMIE: We can be very helpful to you. Your Uncle Julius has a tremendous influence. He is on intimate terms with Henry Blocker of the First National Bank.

JULIUS: Not that old fool Judge Henry Blocker. He's not in the bank. It's Samuel Blocker.

MAMIE: Samuel Blocker, then. There will be no need of your worrying about your clothes being a trifle shabby, because I have an old coat that could be cleaned and pressed to look just like new.

LYDIA: But, mother, why can't—I want to know why can't she live with us all the time?

JULIUS: Well (*coughing*), why—a—simply—because——

LYDIA (*Starts to cry again*): I suppose that's an extravagance too. I think it's a shame. I want to have Phoebe. (*Cries hard. They strive to soothe her. The bell rings.*)

MAMIE: Who can that be? I hope it's not a guest. I haven't a thing in the house. (*The bell rings again. Julius goes to the door and comes back carrying a large package, decorated with sprigs of holly. Mamie and Lydia crowd around the table as he unwraps it. Finally, he discloses an elaborate silver tea-set with*

complete accessories. They gasp with admiration and Lydia claps her hands.)

MAMIE (*Finally*): Who sent it? (*There is a scramble for the card.*)

JULIUS (*Finds it and reads*): "Holiday greetings from Judge and Mrs. Henry Blocker."

MAMIE: What a beautiful Christmas spirit! I've been dying for a new tea-set. How lovely of them,—so thoughtful. They certainly spared no expense. And here you've been calling the Judge an old fool.

LYDIA: What are you going to give them?

(*There is an abrupt silence and then Julius solemnly repeats*): That's the question. What are we going to give them?

MAMIE: It will have to be something elaborate to compensate for that.

LYDIA: What does "compensate" mean, mother?

MAMIE: I used the wrong word. I mean reciprocate.

JULIUS: Yes, indeed, it will cost us a pretty penny. Can't you think of something, Mamie?

MAMIE: Can't you? You are always so ingenious.

JULIUS (*Absorbed*): How would a beautiful lamp do?

MAMIE: Can you get one wholesale?

JULIUS: I think so, if I call up Macpherson.

MAMIE: This is a bad time. He may not like to be called up at his home, after business hours.

JULIUS: Perhaps we won't have to send anything so expensive anyway. Haven't you something about the house?

MAMIE: Let me see. Christmas presents are a

nuisance. I have that little alcohol lamp that the Smiths sent me last year from Wisconsin.

JULIUS: The very thing,—but is it enough?

MAMIE: You could send that to Judge Blocker and I could send a piece of handwork to his wife. The two presents would look rather pretentious.

JULIUS: Good! You're a very clever wife, Mamie.

MAMIE: That is, if I have any on hand. Lydia, bring me my embroidery box. (*Lydia goes at once.*) It seems to me that I had a handsome table cover put away and if it's there, it will be just the thing. (*Lydia returns with the box and Mamie searches it hastily.*) Sure enough, here it is. But it's not quite finished. What shall I do? There's at least an hour's work here and I'll have to get it there right away so that they won't think that we waited to get their gift first. (*Thinks a moment.*) I know. Phoebe, you crochet, don't you? All girls do nowadays. Here, won't you be good enough to finish out these few scallops of the border while I do the ends? (*Begins instructing her.*) You see, you take ten stitches here: go back nine; herring stitch twice and then overcast. Quite easy. That's right. (*Watches her approvingly and then goes over to admire the tea-set.*) It's handsome. How could you say that the Judge is an old fool? You certainly never did understand men.

JULIUS (*Annoyed*): Never did understand men. Well, I know a business man when I see one. The Judge doesn't know any more about business than a child. See what he did. (*Rushes over to chair and*

takes purse out of his coat pocket.) See what he did, seeing you know so much about business. He met me down-town this afternoon and paid me the money he owed me in spot cash. There it is (*opening purse*) one thousand dollars in spot cash. You'd think he had never heard of a check. The old farmer!

MAMIE (*Startled*): Good heavens, Julius, how much is it? I'm afraid to have you carry so much.

JULIUS: Nonsense. It's only a little over eleven hundred dollars.

MAMIE: Why didn't you put it in the bank?

JULIUS: I told you just now that he gave it to me this evening, after the bank was closed. You know I'm not a baby. It isn't the first time I've carried a little money. (*He returns the purse to the coat pocket.*) You don't need to worry. If you'll excuse me now, I'll go on with my paper. (*Sits down and begins to read.*)

LYDIA (*Tosses doll across room in a rage*): Now what am I going to do? Mama's working and Phoebe's working. What am I going to do?

MAMIE: You're going to bed, young lady. (*Takes her by the hand and leads her off while Lydia shrieks and continues to shriek.*)

MAMIE (*Finally calling from the other room*): Julius, come here. I can't do a thing with her, Julius.

JULIUS (*Exasperated, pitches paper on to the floor*): That child is a nuisance. (*Rushes into other room.*)

(*The sound of Lydia's crying mingles with the voices of Mamie and Julius. Meanwhile the girl rises, looks cautiously about, runs over to the coat and takes out the money. She removes several bills which she*

places in an envelope. She addresses the envelope, puts a stamp on it and places it under the dictionary. Then she writes a note, places it in a conspicuous place, near the telephone. She is about to make a hasty retreat when Mamie calls suddenly from the other room: "Phoebe, oh, Phoebe." She waits breathless a moment. Then Mamie calls again: "Don't bother. It's all right." The girl rushes out of the room. There is silence for a few seconds and then Mamie reenters.)

MAMIE: How are you getting along, Phoebe? *(Not seeing her):* Phoebe, where are you? Phoebe Louise. Julius! Lydia! Come quickly. She's gone. Hurry up.

JULIUS: What's happened? Who's gone?

MAMIE: Phoebe Louise. She's gone.

JULIUS: Well, what of it? A good riddance, I'd say.

MAMIE: What of it? But your,—your—

JULIUS: By jove! *(Rushes over to his coat. Searches it wildly.)* It's gone. My pocketbook. It's gone. She's robbed us.

MAMIE: Good heavens! Call the police. We might catch her. Hurry!

JULIUS *(Rushes over to the telephone. He sees the note):* What's this? *(Opens it quickly.)* Here's a message.

MAMIE: Read it!

JULIUS *(Savagely):* Give me time. *(Puts on his glasses and reads):* "You have both made a big mistake. I am not Phoebe Louise and I never saw Phoebe Louise. I am simply—"

MAMIE: Good heavens! What did I tell you? How could you be so careless?

JULIUS: I wasn't careless. You called me away. How should I know that she—

MAMIE: Go on. Finish the letter.

JULIUS (*Reading*): "I didn't take all of the money. I left three hundred dollars for Phoebe Louise. Give it to her, please, when she comes. Poor soul! She will need it, with such relatives."

MAMIE: She left three hundred dollars, she says.

JULIUS: Where is it? Why don't you look for it?

MAMIE: Finish the letter and find out where it is.

JULIUS: "The money is under the dictionary in a stamped envelope addressed to Phoebe Louise. See that she gets it. Good-by. I'll send you a souvenir postal card some day."

JULIUS: What impudence. "See that she gets it."
(*Mamie finds the envelope.*)

JULIUS: It's our money.

MAMIE: But is it? I don't know whether it is or not?

JULIUS: What do you mean? Are you crazy?

MAMIE: It's in a letter addressed to some one else. We daren't take it. It's like stealing.

JULIUS: Stealing! That's good logic. The money's ours. The envelope's ours and the stamp is ours. Haven't we lost enough already without losing—

MAMIE: I don't care what you say. I won't touch it. I like money, but this seems like a theft.

JULIUS: Well, if you won't, I will.

MAMIE: We'll see about that.

(Their angry voices rise together. Then the bell rings and they grow suddenly silent.)

JULIUS *(Startled)*: It's the real Phoebe Louise. She's come at last. Hurry. Give me the money.

MAMIE: The real Phoebe Louise. Lots you know about it. You said the other was the exact image of her father, the father you hadn't seen in twenty years. *(They quarrel again, both trying to hold the envelope. The bell rings a second time. They rush to the door, then back to the table and then back to the door, gesticulating angrily. Reenter Lydia, in her night-gown.)*

LYDIA: The bell's ringing. Why don't you answer it? *(Mamie and Julius continue to rush back and forth. Lydia watches them and then breaks into a long hearty laugh.)*

•
CURTAIN

EVER YOUNG

A ONE-ACT PLAY

By

ALICE GERSTENBERG

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Alice Gerstenberg was born in Chicago of parents who were both born in Chicago (Erich and Julia Gerstenberg) 3rd generation in that city. She was educated at Bryn Mawr College. She is the author of

Novels—*Unquenched Fire*, published by Small, Maynard, Boston, 1912, republished in England by John Long, and *The Conscience of Sarah Platt*, A. C. McClurg & Company. A dramatization (published and produced) of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. Produced at the Fine Arts Theatre, Chicago, and at the Booth Theatre, New York.

Overtones, a one-act play, produced by the Washington Square Players at the Bandbox Theatre to represent the American play in a group of comparative comedies. Later produced in vaudeville with Helen Lackaye and in England with Lily Langtry. Later published by Doubleday, Page & Company, in a volume entitled *Four Washington Square Plays*. (The three-act version of this play by Alice Gerstenberg and Alan Kay has recently been produced in *The Playwrights' Theatre* of Chicago.)

"Beyond," a monologue published in a volume by Little, Brown & Company, entitled *Representative Plays*, selected by Margaret G. Mayorga.

"The Pot Boiler," a one-act play published in a volume by Stewart-Kidd entitled *Fifty Contemporary*

One-Act Plays of the World, compiled by Frank Shay and Pierre Loving. *The Pot Boiler* was played in the Players' Workshop, Chicago; the Theatre Workshop, New York; by the Arthur Maitland Players, San Francisco; by the Community Theatre in Hollywood; in many other Little Theatres; in the trenches in France, and in vaudeville.

Other one-act productions are *The Unseen*, *Fourteen*, *The Buffer*, *He Said and She Said*, *Hearts*, *Ever Young*, *Attuned*, *The Illuminnatti in Drama Libre*, etc.

For the last three years Miss Gerstenberg has been chairman of the Drama Committee of the Arts Club of Chicago, 610 South Michigan Avenue, and has been producing plays which otherwise would have no opportunity of production because of the present state of the commercial theatre.

EVER YOUNG

Ever Young is one of Miss Gerstenberg's favorite plays. She herself says of it: "It is a dramatic exercise in writing, a play with very little 'business' (such as moving around the stage, etc.), but the dramatic action, mental, emotional and comic, holds an audience tense. For study in technique, it ought to be interesting as it shows how much emotional drama can be enacted on an almost static stage."

The characters in this play are not at all the motherly, sweet old ladies so common to the story and the drama. Nevertheless, the author is holding the

mirror before a real phase of American life. The young reader should remember that the author here merely paints an interesting and amusing picture—she does *not* exhibit models!

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EVER YOUNG

*(A cross-section of the life and character of
four women)*

CHARACTERS

MRS. PHOEBE PAYNE-DEXTER.

MRS. AGNES DORCHESTER.

MRS. WILLIAM BLANCHARD.

MRS. CAROLINE COURTNEY-PAGE.

These four distinguished-looking women of some sixty and seventy years, but in spirit forever young, enjoy spending a few hours after dinner chatting in a corner of the lobby of the Poincianna Hotel, Palm Beach, at the height of the season, from which vantage ground they may view the passing show of fashionables.

SCENE: *A corner of the lobby of the Poincianna Hotel, Palm Beach, showing wicker chairs (with cretonne cushions) sheltered by palms. From the distance come faint strains of an orchestra.*

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: *(Enters from right as if looking for a comfortable chair. She pulls the chairs about until she has placed them to suit herself. She is followed by Mrs. Dorchester, who also chooses a chair to suit herself. Mrs. Payne-Dexter's face is*

wrinkled but there is little sign of age in her worldly humorous eyes, her tightly corseted figure, her vibrant personality. She wears a lavender brocade evening gown and a dog-collar of diamonds. Her white hair is perfectly marcelled and her well manicured hands flash with rings. She uses a diamond studded lorgnette and carries a large hotel room key. She takes her chair with the authority of a leader.) There was no need to hurry through dinner, Agnes, there are plenty of chairs.

MRS. DORCHESTER: (*Follows Mrs. Payne-Dexter. She is a sweet placid-faced woman with white hair, not marcelled, and the rosy complexion of one who has lived without hurry on a country estate. She wears eye-glasses; she is gowned in rich gold silk and is rather too overladen with old-fashioned jewelry, ear-rings, bracelets, pendants, rings, mostly amber, gold and black onyx. She carries a capacious bag of black and gold brocade which contains her knitting and which she begins to pull out as soon as she is comfortably seated. The ball of wool and the baby sock she is knitting are soft blue.*) We missed our chance last night because you lingered over your coffee.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER (*Dominatingly*): I always linger over my coffee. I always did with Thomas when he was alive. Our family always has lingered over the coffee.

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Mildly*): In another moment there would not have been a chair vacant. Which one do you prefer?

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Put one aside for Mrs.

Blanchard. I nodded to her in this direction as we came out of the dining-room.

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Sits*): She will like this corner. We can see every one who crosses the lobby.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER (*Using her lorgnette*): How many sights and how many frights shall we see to-night? Really, Agnes, I wish you would give up wearing your old-fashioned onyx and amber. Why don't you turn in all that junk and get something new and fashionable? (*Sits.*)

MRS. DORCHESTER: Oh, I've never had any desire to buy jewelry since my husband died.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: But that was ages ago. I've had all my diamonds reset since Thomas went. I had my wedding ring melted and molded again into an orange wreath.

MRS. DORCHESTER: There's the young bride who arrived to-day.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Where?

MRS. DORCHESTER: Over there near the fountain in a very low gown.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: I don't see her.

MRS. DORCHESTER: She moved behind the column.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER (*Rises and crosses*): I can't see her. Why didn't you tell me before the column got in the way?

MRS. DORCHESTER: If you were not so vain, Phoebe, you would wear decent glasses like mine.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Indeed, I can see perfectly well.

MRS. DORCHESTER: Well, I don't blame you for

using your lorgnette. It does add distinction to your Payne-Dexter manner.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER (*Amused*): What! Are you still impressed by my manner?

MRS. DORCHESTER: I have been for fifty years—dear me, Phoebe, is it really fifty years ago since you and I were débutantes?

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER (*Looking about carefully*): Ssh! Don't let the hotel know I'm seventy.

MRS. DORCHESTER: No one guesses it.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER (*Rises and takes chair next to Mrs. Dorchester*): I certainly don't feel it, but let me tell you, these young débutantes of to-day with their supercilious airs, their sophisticated conversation, their smoking in public places, are not going to crowd me back into a grandmother's corner. No! I shall live another twenty years at least, if only to see these young things grow into the troubles of married life, and it will please me.

MRS. DORCHESTER: Why have you such animosity toward the débutantes? You terrorize them. Everywhere they side-step for you. In elevators, corridors, in the ballroom, on the beach, they put themselves out to be deferential to you. It is "Good morning, Mrs. Payne-Dexter," "Good afternoon, Mrs. Payne-Dexter," "Good evening, Mrs. Payne-Dexter," but they never see me, even though we have been here since the opening of the season.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: It is 'because you don't create the atmosphere which demands their attention. I am putting on all the Payne-Dexter airs I can think of to terrorize them: I *want* to make the débutantes

and their smart young men side-step for me. Their youth and prettiness is no longer mine, but I hold over them the whip hand. I am a dowager, a member of a society that once ruled New York, and does still to a certain extent and they shall bow to me as long as I inhale one breath of life!

MRS. DORCHESTER: I do believe you are jealous of the present generation.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: I am, I am fiercely jealous.

MRS. DORCHESTER: But we have had our own day, Phoebe, it is their turn. It is our time to sit back and give them a chance.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Agnes, you have kept your health living on your estate in Long Island, but you have watched the inevitable drying up of flowers and leaves in autumn and you have followed what seems to you the inevitable progress of autumn into winter—well, *my* hair may be white as snow, but my blood is still red!

MRS. DORCHESTER: Your vitality is a marvel to every one. Your club work, civic and social leadership make even the doctors amazed at you.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: The doctors are my worst enemies. They tell me I must not eat this, I must not do that. They tell me I am getting old, that I must rest. I do not wish to rest, I simply won't grow old. When one has been a leader, one can not let younger women usurp one's position.

MRS. DORCHESTER: You still have your leadership.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: I still have it because I *will* have it, because I will not let it go, but I have to strive harder for it every year, every year I must grow

more imperious, more dominating, more terrorizing to hold supremacy over this new independent generation. (*Looks off left.*) There is that little presumptuous May Whigham. She is eighteen and so rude I should like to spank her.

MRS. DORCHESTER: They all fear you, Phoebe.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER (*With grim humor*): I hope so. I shall not be pushed into a corner as long as I still draw one breath of life!

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Looking off right*): Good evening, Mrs. Blanchard.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: We have kept a chair for you.

MRS. BLANCHARD (*Enters up-stage from audience. She is thin, a trifle bent with age and needs a walking cane. It is gold-topped and suspended on it is a fan of lavender plumes, and a gold mesh bag. In her left hand she carries a book. She is exquisitely gowned in light blue chiffon and rare old lace. Her face is like a cameo, scarcely a wrinkle in it, and her smile is illuminatingly young. She wears a diamond necklace but no rings.*) Good evening, Mrs. Payne-Dexter, Mrs. Dorchester.

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Helping Mrs. Blanchard*): Sit down, Mrs. Blanchard.

MRS. BLANCHARD: No, thank you, do not help me. I am about to throw it away.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Throw your cane away?

MRS. BLANCHARD (*With a light in her eyes*): Yes, I am not going to need it in a week or so.

MRS. DORCHESTER: I heard of a woman the other day who dispensed with her cane.

MRS. BLANCHARD: Who was it?

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Nods off right*): That golf champion, what's her name, she's over there—the one with the burnt V on her chest—she told me all about a case, but, dear me, I never can remember names.

MRS. BLANCHARD: I shall have to ask her about it.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Are you getting stronger Mrs. Blanchard!

MRS. BLANCHARD: I must get stronger. I am tired of depending upon a cane. Everywhere I go people are putting themselves out to be polite to me. Men help me, women send their men to help me, chauffeurs help me, bell-boys help me, waiters help me, *débutantes* help me—

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: *Débutantes*! I can scarcely believe it!

MRS. BLANCHARD: The *débutantes* hop around me like so many sand-flies—all of them wanting to help me walk. I feel like swatting them with this (*shakes cane*). Their politeness to my infirmity is an insult. If they would only be rude!

MRS. DORCHESTER: Mrs. Payne-Dexter was just complaining that they were too rude.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Rude! They are!

MRS. BLANCHARD: If they are rude to you it is a compliment. They do not look upon you as old and decrepid. I resent their solicitude. In a day or two I shall throw this old thing away! (*She tosses the cane aside.*)

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Mrs. Blanchard!

MRS. BLANCHARD: It is no idle threat, I mean it!

MRS. DORCHESTER: But you told me you had used it fifteen years.

MRS. BLANCHARD: So I have, and it is old enough to throw away. It is the oldest leg I have and it is going to be thrown away.

MRS. DORCHESTER: *Oldest?*

MRS. BLANCHARD: What are you doubting?

MRS. DORCHESTER: My dear Mrs. Blanchard, you just said your cane is the oldest leg you have—

MRS. BLANCHARD: So it is.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER (*Humorously*): Mrs. Dorchester would like to know just exactly *how old* the others are.

MRS. BLANCHARD: The others are just exactly *not* more than nine months!

MRS. DORCHESTER: Nine months!

MRS. BLANCHARD: Do you think I should say *ninety* years?

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Isn't it a little nearer to the truth?

MRS. BLANCHARD (*Triumphantly*): But it is not the truth! The wonderful truth is that my legs are not seventy-one years old, they are not more than nine months old. I have been reading an amazing book. (*She holds book up.*)

MRS. DORCHESTER: What is it?

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER (*Using lorgnette*): *Truth and Youth.*

MRS. BLANCHARD: This book says that every cell in our body is completely new every nine months.

MRS. DORCHESTER: I heard about that. My

daughter was reading a book about that, I forget what it was called.

MRS. BLANCHARD: Each cell reproduces itself according to the impression given to it by our subconscious mind. As we grow old we hold a thought of age and impress the cells with that thought, but if we rid ourselves of the illusion of old age we can remain ever young.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Let me have this book. I would pay a fortune for youth.

MRS. BLANCHARD: We do not have to pay for youth. We just have to *think* it and *be* it. It is very simple they say, when you have faith.

MRS. DORCHESTER: What was that book my daughter was reading—dear, dear, I never can remember names, and titles and numbers!

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Too much wool, Agnes, I tell you you are growing old—

MRS. BLANCHARD: She does not look it.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Her mind is one hundred and fifty years old!

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Good-naturedly*): Not quite. I have had too many financial matters to attend to since my husband died to let me slip too far behind the times, but I believe in accepting old age with as good a grace as possible.

MRS. BLANCHARD: Rubbish! That is antediluvian! I am just beginning to learn how to live. Do you know I have just obtained my divorce?

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Have you divorced Mr. Blanchard, after all these years?

MRS. BLANCHARD: Yes, after all these years. I suppose you know the story of my life. It was nationally commented upon when my daughter married the Duke of Caubreigh.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: My St. Louis friends often mentioned you, that is why I was so interested in meeting you here this season. When my husband was alive he used to hear things at the clubs.

MRS. BLANCHARD: No doubt he did. My husband has been notoriously unfaithful to me. I grieved about it for more than forty years and I never had the sense to get rid of him. Never had the courage until now—but now, it is all as clear as day to me— If I have been a fool for forty years must I stay a fool forever? No, I kicked over the traces, with my wooden leg—and I am a free woman.

MRS. DORCHESTER: How odd, to think of your wilfully giving up your husband when we widows so wish ours back again.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Did your husband contest it?

MRS. BLANCHARD: My husband was amazed, indignant—he writes me imploring letters. He is old now and ready to settle down. Now, when he is ready to sit before the fireplace and watch me knit, I have played a trick on him—I am not ready to sit before the fireplace and I would rather play roulette than knit. By the way I gambled three hundred dollars away last night.

MRS. DORCHESTER: We left early.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: That is, at midnight.

MRS. DORCHESTER: We rode around a bit before

coming in. It was so balmy and I just love to ride in the chairs.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: I suppose it was not quite the thing for two lone women to ride around in the moonlight at midnight, but the colored boy said every one does it at Palm Beach.

MRS. DORCHESTER: It was very romantic.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: There is romance in every breeze through the palm trees.

MRS. BLANCHARD (*Gaily*): I didn't come back to the hotel until morning. I stayed on and played, had breakfast there—came home without a ring on my finger—handed them over as security to a friend who thought it funny to take them—

MRS. DORCHESTER: We missed you on the beach this morning.

MRS. BLANCHARD: I slept until luncheon. I am going back to-night to win my rings again. (*She dangles a gold bag stuffed with bills.*) Starting with five hundred to-night.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Before you know it you will have gambled a fortune away!

MRS. BLANCHARD (*Laughs*): I'm not worrying. I receive an amazing high alimony. The court figured that I would not live long and that I needed much medical care. Well, I am not paying out any money for medical care and when it comes to having a good time I am making up for forty years! I found only one man in my whole life whom I really loved and he was not my husband. (*Hastily.*) Be shocked if you want to—I am free now and can speak of it.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: What happened?

MRS. BLANCHARD: I have never known what became of him.

MRS. DORCHESTER: I can't imagine what it must be not to love one's husband. I miss mine so!

MRS. BLANCHARD: I had been married only four months when I heard of my husband's infatuation for a married woman in our own set. He had married me only, it seems, to allay suspicion. Of course, I see now that I should have divorced him then and there, but I was very young and it wasn't being done in those days. In those hours of my disillusion a dashing young lieutenant understood my despair and planned to arouse my husband's jealousy and so bring him back to me—

MRS. DORCHESTER: Phoebe, stop fuddling with your door-key. It gets on my nerves.

MRS. BLANCHARD: He succeeded in arousing my husband's jealousy but meanwhile I had fallen in love with the lieutenant—

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: And he with you no doubt?

MRS. BLANCHARD: Yes.

MRS. DORCHESTER: Mrs. Blanchard, it is a life-tragedy, but not a line of it shows in your face.

MRS. BLANCHARD: I wouldn't let it show in my face. I harbored a secret thought—a terrible thought that my husband might die, that I might be free to find the other again, that then he should not see an old wrinkled face after he had cherished the memory of my youth.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Think of living like that

all these years when you might have had a divorce long ago.

MRS. BLANCHARD: It's humorous in a way, isn't it? That when women like you and Mrs. Dorchester are widowed, I had to put up with a husband who just *wouldn't* die?

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: What became of the lieutenant?

MRS. BLANCHARD: He asked to be transferred to another post. He wanted to go as far away from me as possible—no distance seemed far enough to break the magnetic attraction between us. Finally he was sent as far away as China, and there we lost track of him in the Boxer rebellion.

MRS. DORCHESTER: And you never heard from him again?

MRS. BLANCHARD: No. The Government reported him as missing. No doubt the Chinese took him prisoner. If he died—and I think he must have died—all these years I have imagined that he died—I have felt his spirit near me—guiding me—watching over me—

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Shaking her head*): Do you believe he could be near you? I don't believe that my husband is. I sit and knit and think of him, but the beyond seems nothing but void and silence.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER (*Practically*): Well, I believe in believing anything that helps you.

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Shaking head*): I can't get into communication.

MRS. BLANCHARD (*Hopefully*): Oh! I know Oliver Trent has never forgotten me. If he had lived

or escaped, Oliver would have found me. I know Oliver died and that his spirit has been lovingly near me these twenty years!

MRS. DORCHESTER: My husband and I loved each other deeply. That love, it seems to me, should hold us together even after he has gone, but I can't believe that it does.

MRS. BLANCHARD: It does and it will, if you have faith. There is nothing but love—I am beginning to feel it—for a long while I tried to make myself believe it—for a long while I could only *think*, but now I am beginning to feel it—deep within me to realize it!—and I feel warm all through. Oh, I shall put aside my ancient legs! (*She flings the cane aside.*)

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Of course, he loved you—I am sure he did.

MRS. DORCHESTER: If he were only alive now that you have your divorce.

MRS. BLANCHARD: So you see my romance is only a shadow—only a thought—there is nothing tangible—I dared keep no letters, not one single token of his—only my thoughts, but those thoughts have kept me from going to pieces all these years.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: And the thoughts have kept your face so young.

MRS. BLANCHARD: I would not let my face change—if by some miracle I should see him again I must be as he remembered me—but I couldn't control my body as well—I seemed to get wearier and wearier of life until I needed a cane to lean on—and then I doubled up on that and here I am—

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: And here you are threatening to walk without it.

MRS. BLANCHARD (*Brightening*): I will too, I will. I only sadden when I begin to think of the past. It's a bad habit. I shall not do it any more. Only if I could be sure he died with just me in his heart, I wouldn't mind so much his not being alive. If I knew that all these years it has been he guiding me and not my imagination and self-deception, that he is near me all the time—if I could but know that.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: I should certainly continue to believe that he remembered me.

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Consolingly*): I am sure he did.

MRS. BLANCHARD (*Shakes her head*): I built my life upon my faith in him—if I should be robbed of this belief in his love for me—I think it would—kill me.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: But if you could have proof of his love—

MRS. BLANCHARD (*With shining eyes*): Oh! If I could have proof.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER (*Looking off stage*): There's that beautiful Mrs. Courtney-Page. I should like to know her better. Shall we invite her to sit with us?

MRS. BLANCHARD: Who is she?

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: The white-haired woman in white velvet carrying a black fan. She is just coming out of mourning for her last husband.

MRS. DORCHESTER: Last! How many did she have?

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: The manicurist told me she had three—and the clerk in the jewel shop told me only one, they were appraising her pearls—she has such marvelous pearls—I'd love to see her pearls close by—wouldn't you?—

MRS. BLANCHARD (*Amused*): Oh! yes, do invite her over—I'd like to exchange data about husbands. Is she down here alone?

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: They say she came alone—but I've noticed her on the beach with one man, and in a wheel-chair with another—she's alone now though and evidently looking for a place to sit—call her over, Agnes.

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Timidly*): But I don't know her. Phoebe, you call her.

MRS. BLANCHARD: Don't you know her, Mrs. Payne-Dexter?

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: I might pretend to. How do you do. (*She bows amiably.*)

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: (*Enters from right. She is white-haired and about sixty, but she has dash in her manner and her figure is stunning in a white velvet evening gown. She is the type that can be a vampire at any age. The gown has the medieval charm of long sleeves although it is very low at the throat. Her jewels are pearls, ropes of pearls. She carries a black feather fan, a black velvet bag, and a batch of mail among which is a black rimmed letter.*) How do you do—You must pardon me, I don't recall the name?

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Mrs. Payne-Dexter, of

New York. Don't tell me, Mrs. Courtney-Page, that you have forgotten me.

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE (*With poise*): Oh! yes—Mrs. Payne-Dexter—a name so well known—we met, I remember, exactly five years ago at the opera. Your box was next to the Carrolls'. We were their guests one evening when my late husband and I were in New York on a wedding trip.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Why, yes, of course, how clever of you to remember. My friends, Mrs. Dorchester, Mrs. Blanchard—

MRS. BLANCHARD: How do you do—won't you sit down?

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: Yes, thank you. (*She sits.*) I have noticed you, Mrs. Blanchard. Your cane? (*She picks it up and courteously hands it to Mrs. Blanchard.*)

MRS. BLANCHARD (*Courteously taking it as an evidence of courteous consideration*): Thank you.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Mrs. Dorchester and I have been spending the season in Palm Beach. Mrs. Dorchester is a native of Long Island.

MRS. BLANCHARD: And I came down from St. Louis and had the good fortune to become acquainted with them, personally. I have always known Mrs. Payne-Dexter by reputation.

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: Blanchard of St. Louis. The name is very familiar—

MRS. BLANCHARD: My daughter married the Duke of Caubreigh—

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: Oh! yes—yes—but just lately—it seems to me I saw that name lately.

MRS. BLANCHARD: No doubt you did. I am celebrating my divorce!

MRS. DORCHESTER: I think she has a great deal of courage to face the world alone—voluntarily.

MRS. BLANCHARD: It is rejuvenating to feel so marvelously free!

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: She is quite right. Why should a woman remain in bondage when there is at every turn a new chance for a better alliance!

MRS. BLANCHARD: Good gracious! Do you believe me capable of marrying again at my age?

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: Why not? A woman can marry any man she wants.

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Mildly*): Oh! The man may get the woman he wants, Henry kept insisting until I married him, but I don't think it's the other way round; do you, Phoebe?

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER (*Dominating manner*): I don't know. I worked very hard for Thomas but I got him.

MRS. BLANCHARD: I haven't an opinion. The one I wanted I met only when it was too late.

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: What do you mean by too late?

MRS. BLANCHARD: After I was married to some one else.

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: But now you are divorced—

MRS. BLANCHARD: Oh! it's too late now. My romance was over twenty years ago.

MRS. DORCHESTER: Do you really think a woman can marry any man she wants?

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: I've proved it. I was engaged three times, married once, once widowed, and now I have another fiancé. Isn't that a proof?

MRS. BLANCHARD (*Suavely*): You are, if you will pardon my frankness, a very handsome woman, Mrs. Courtney-Page. Such attractions would not require much further effort on your part.

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: Thank you, but there is a science about attracting love as there is about everything else. There hasn't been a moment of my life when I haven't been in love.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER (*Rather snortingly*): That's impossible! There aren't enough people in the world for that!

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE (*With real tenderness*): Oh! yes there are—as long as you hold the thought of love, you will find those you *can* love—and as long as you love you will attract it in return.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Where is your home now, Mrs. Courtney-Page?

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: Chicago, but I was born in San Francisco. I was Emily Tardon.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Emily Tardon! You don't mean it! Are you really! Why, it just seems yesterday when all the magazines were full of your photographs, the most beautiful débutante on the western coast!

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: They did make a fuss about it when I became engaged to Harlow Bingham—I was only eighteen then. When I look back and think what a brilliant career I might have had with Harlow—well—you know he died—(*she sighs*)—be-

fore we were married—an accident—horse-racing. Poor Harlow, he gave me my first pearls. (*She unconsciously plays with a strand of pearls.*)

MRS. BLANCHARD: Magnificent pearls!

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER (*Using lorgnette*): I have scarcely been able to keep my eyes off of them.

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: This strand—the shortest and smallest—was given to me by Harlow Bingham upon our engagement. He gave me a solitaire too, but the pearls were a gift of thanks because I had given up the desire to go on the stage to marry him.

MRS. DORCHESTER: Oh, did you want to be an actress?

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: I have wanted nothing more all of my life.

MRS. BLANCHARD: You would have made a good one too.

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: My family opposed me as all families do.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: They did in those days.

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: So I had to give up the idea of acting on the stage. (*But it is evident that she has been acting in real life ever since.*)

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER (*In a whisper, looking down right*): Look, look, that's the man who tried to flirt with me the other day at the the tea dance in the Grove.

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: Don't you know who that is?

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: No.

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: That's Beverly Strawn, our best seller novelist.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Gracious! Hide me! He must have been picking me out for the dowager mother-in-law in his next novel—

MRS. DORCHESTER: Did you marry Mr. Courtney-Page after Mr.—what's his name died— Your first fiancé?

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: No. I became engaged to Philip Harlow, an Englishman, I met in Egypt. He was on his way to South Africa. He had been in diplomatic service in India and had been transferred. He brought me this second strand—the second largest and longest—from India. He went ahead to South Africa to prepare a home intending to come back for me, but he died of fever—and we—were never married.

MRS. BLANCHARD: How thrillingly tragic!

MRS. DORCHESTER: I could not have endured it.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: And the other strands—you have two more—

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: This third one was the gift of my husband, Mr. Courtney-Page. I would not let him give them to me until after we were married.

MRS. DORCHESTER: That was a wise precaution. They say pearls mean tears.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: It is surprising that he risked giving you pearls at all.

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: He felt he had to because he was jealous of the others—of course, I couldn't throw the others away—they were so beautiful and so costly—

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Naturally not.

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: So he finally purchased a strand in Vienna—larger and longer than the other.

MRS. BLANCHARD: And *then* did he die too?

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: Oh! no, Mr. Courtney-Page was the third man I was engaged to, but the only one I married. He died scarcely a year ago.

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Takes some digestive tablets out of her bag and offers them*): Will you have a life-preserver? I ate something to-night that didn't quite agree with me. (*She takes one.*)

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER (*Takes one*): Thank you.

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Offering*): Mrs. Blanchard?

MRS. BLANCHARD: No, thanks, I don't need them any more since I am taking the new diet.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: What is your new diet?

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Silently offers Mrs. Courtney-Page, who takes one.*)

MRS. BLANCHARD: Nuts, fruit, no meat, no bread, no hot vegetables, no coffee, no tea—

MRS. DORCHESTER: Have you stopped eating altogether?

MRS. BLANCHARD: Only fruit and nuts—I feel as light as a feather—in another day I shall walk and throw away this stick!

MRS. DORCHESTER: You said in another week you would throw it away.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Now be careful, don't take risks!

MRS. BLANCHARD: The book says we must not have negatives in our mind. I tell you that if I can have enough faith I shall walk alone!

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Oh! the book.

MRS. BLANCHARD (*Handing book to Mrs. Payne-Dexter*): *Truth and Youth.*

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER (*Reading from book at random*): "The average man and woman of middle age chooses a comfortable chair and settles down into it with the thought that life is finished and it is necessary to await the end. Women do this more than men. When women see their little children grown to manhood and independent of them, they feel that their use in life is over. Nothing is more untrue. The grandmother is a free—"

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Interrupting as she glances off down left*): Just a moment, Phoebe, excuse me, but what did you say was the name of the woman in jet—walking with the aviator—did she fly down with him from New York?

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: That's Hilda Dane, one of the *Follies*. They say she has her skin insured when she's on the beach.

MRS. BLANCHARD: I have never seen her skin. She paints it up with whitewash and her lips are thick with red paint. Yesterday on the beach she wore a lemon colored woolen cape with a big sable collar and every diamond that has ever been given to her.

MRS. DORCHESTER: Is she married to the aviator?

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER (*Going back to her book*): Don't ask absurd questions, Agnes. "The grandmother is a free woman, she has a new youth. She has the vision of experience with which to experiment for greater wisdom—" Ah, Agnes, you must read this book—it will stir you up—your very mind is getting to be like wool.

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Amused*): I have always been more domestic than you, Phoebe.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Domestic! Haven't I done my share? Haven't I run a house in New York, a house in Newport, a house in London, apartments in Paris, I even had a palace one season in Venice—no, it is not domesticity that is making you old, it is mental lethargy!

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: That is the worst enemy to youth, mental lethargy, I refuse to have it!

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Mrs. Dorchester doesn't live for herself any more. When she is at home, she is a slave to her grandchildren, when she is away she can scarcely take time from the wool to look at a cocoanut grove.

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Looking away*): Oh, I can knit without looking.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: I am more selfish. I let my children and grandchildren alone. As long as they are not starving, it is no business of mine to live for them. I do not spend my evenings knitting baby-socks. I have my opera box, I give dinner parties and entertain distinguished foreign visitors. I have my club committees, my charities, and I am studying art so as to be able to add to my husband's collection of paintings—as a memorial to him—and I am taking up Spanish because I am planning to spend next season in Buenos Aires. But you, Agnes, you make your children dependent upon you—you are always nursing some grandchild through something.

MRS. DORCHESTER: But when they are ill, I *must* help them.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: You think you must and they let you think it because they don't want to hurt your feelings by letting you know they don't need you. You take care of a grandchild so its own mother can go and play bridge, you save your son a nurse's bill while he spends the money playing polo at the country club.

MRS. DORCHESTER: But it isn't a happy thought not to be needed.

MRS. BLANCHARD: You were telling us about your pearls, Mrs. Courtney-Page. It is an exquisite pleasure to look at them.

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: This fourth strand, the largest and longest, is the gift of my new fiancé. I am down here waiting for time to pass—we shall be married as soon as it seems correct.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Dear me (*She looks off down left*), there's Mrs. Wallace Morse in another gown—and as usual no petticoat.

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: Well, I think she *does* wear one!

MRS. BLANCHARD: Aren't you lucky to find a fiancé again! I am afraid I couldn't bring myself to care for any man as much as I have cared for one in the past.

MRS. DORCHESTER: Nor I.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Hump! Men aren't worth bothering about.

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: I was so lost without marriage companionship that when I was in Paris last autumn, I picked out the most eligible man I could

find. He is quite old, but very nice and has valuable mines in Australia.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Is he a Frenchman?

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: No, an American, but he hasn't been in this country since he was sent to the American Legation in China. He has had an exciting life. He was taken prisoner in the Boxer rebellion and was reported missing for years, but a faithful Chinese servant smuggled him to Australia.

MRS. BLANCHARD (*Begins to tremble with premonition—her hands quiver as they clutch her cane*): Your fiancé, his name—

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: Oliver Trent—president of the Australia Mining Company of—

MRS. BLANCHARD (*With a gasp of anguish looses her hold on the cane; it falls unheeded to the floor*): Oliver Trent—you said Oliver Trent?

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Blandly*): Why—wasn't that the name of the man you loved—wasn't that the name, Phoebe?

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: The man, Mrs. Blanchard—I don't understand—

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER (*Trying to relieve the situation*): Mrs. Blanchard had been telling us about a friend of hers who had been lost in the Boxer rebellion. She thought he had died. No doubt it is a consolation to her to know that he still lives.

MRS. BLANCHARD (*Wilted and old-looking and with an effort*): No, Mrs. Courtney-Page, I can scarcely bear the fact that he still lives. I have held him in my heart as one dead for twenty years. I have lived on the thought that he loved me. He loved

me once, but I know now that men can not be true. When he went to China he put me out of his mind forever. He has forgotten me—for younger and handsomer women.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Hump! I wouldn't let it worry me. Men are not worth such life-long adoration. You look about and some one else—

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Gently*): Perhaps, Mrs. Courtney-Page will give him up, if we tell her what he means to you.

MRS. BLANCHARD (*Fiercely*): I want my own—not what is cast off—

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE (*Drawing her chair closer to Mrs. Blanchard and speaking gently*): You want me to give him up? (*She fondles the largest strand of pearls reluctantly.*) It would be hard for me to do—It wasn't easy to win him. I had to use all the art I have learned in past experience to get him. He has never been married and is a little afraid—but I won him—if I give him up, are you sure he would remember you?

MRS. BLANCHARD (*In anguish of spirit but under control*): No. Do not trouble. I shall have to bear it. I—I feel quite blind—as if I had been struck on the head—but maybe it is just my heart. You see he and I were very much in love, but I was married and he had to go away. He promised not to forget. But he was young and—and maybe I shouldn't have believed him. When I never heard again and the Government reported him missing, every one said he must be dead. That last day before he went, I met him clandestinely in the Park. I cut off a bit of my hair

that day. It was golden then, like golden amber he said, and he put it into an amber locket he wore on his watch chain.

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Drops her knitting needles and lets her wool roll to the floor*): I remember, I remember, amber locket—from a watch chain—I have it here—I've had it twenty years—made into a bracelet (*She takes off bracelet*). My son brought it home from the Philippines—it was given to him by a Chinese servant—

MRS. BLANCHARD (*In extreme excitement*): The locket—

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: A Chinese servant—

MRS. DORCHESTER: Yes, the very one you said rescued him. I remember it all now. How stupid of me not to think of it before, but as Phoebe says, my mind's all wool—that Chinese servant—

MRS. BLANCHARD: Yes—yes—go on!

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Speedily*): You know the Boxers stormed the Legation—he fought desperately and valiantly, the Chinese servant described all that—how he was taken prisoner and tortured so he almost lost his mind. At night he raved in delirium. He called a woman's name, but there was no one of that name in the Legation,—my son told me but I have such a wretched memory for names—but it wasn't a real name that one could identify—it must have been a nickname—

MRS. BLANCHARD: Was it Dee-dee?

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Pouncingly*): Dee-dee, Dee-dee, that's what it was! Oh! my stupid head!

MRS. BLANCHARD (*Pathetically*): It meant "dear."

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER (*Lovingly at Mrs. Dorchester with increasing suspense*): Why have you kept this from us all this time?

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Gaining assurance*): How could I know my son's story was about Mrs. Blanchard until she mentioned the watch charm?—but now it all comes back to me—at night in delirium he called this name—how he loved this woman—he took the watch charm and opened it and kissed the blonde lock of hair, and he treasured it as nothing else he had. He treasured it so highly that he gave it to his Chinese servant to keep for him—for fear they would rob him of it. They took his money and everything else he had but the servant kept the amber safely—but—but—

MRS. BLANCHARD (*Wrapt attention*): But then how did you forget it?

MRS. DORCHESTER: That's just it—I'll tell you how it was— Oh! my stupid memory. Phoebe, stop fiddling with your door key, you distract me— The amber—the Chinese servant smuggled him into a boat—

MRS. BLANCHARD: Who was smuggled into the boat?

MRS. DORCHESTER: Mr. What's his name—your—

MRS. BLANCHARD: Oliver Trent—

MRS. DORCHESTER: Yes, into the boat—and in the excitement of concealing him behind some kegs—the ship began to move and the Chinese servant had to run to get off and in running he forgot to give up the amber watch charm—and so he kept it—he kept it as a talisman and a few years later when he served

my son in the Philippines, he gave it to him as a talisman when my son was very ill with fever—and my son became superstitious about it and had it set into a bracelet for me as my protection—now, I shall give it to you—for it is your talisman, Mrs. Blanchard, a talisman of his undying love.

(Mrs. Blanchard is incapable of speech, but she takes the bracelet in both hands and raises it to her lips; a light of inspiration comes into her eyes.)

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: And that is why I had such difficulty making him care for me. He told me about his first love—he spoke of her as Dee-dee and he told me that when he lost the amber—he felt that she had gone out of his life forever—he said that she was married and it was unlawful for him to think of her—but he has never forgotten—he told me he would love her always—and when I tell him of you, Mrs. Blanchard, he will come to you at once, for you have been right—his love has been yours and is yours still. I think you ought to have these pearls.

MRS. BLANCHARD *(Her eyes illumined, her body stronger)*: Oh! no, thank you—I don't want them—I—I—have this. *(She holds the locket in her two hands and rises; forgetting her cane.)* Excuse me, ladies, if I go to my room—I—I have had my answer out of the silence—and I'm a little—unstrung. *(She walks out right with great dignity and composure, a grand dame in manner even in her ecstasy and the light in her eyes is a triumph of youth.)*

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER *(Looking after her in awe)*: Without her cane!

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: Don't remind her!

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Sighing*): Poor dear—poor dear—

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Was that all true what you said, Agnes? I never heard you talk so fast in all your life—and how you suddenly got such memory! You never told me anything about that amber charm and you've worn it forever, seems to me!

MRS. DORCHESTER: Father gave it to me my twenty-first birthday to save a lock of my blonde hair. I risked the chance that mine was a duplicate of hers.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: And all you said was a *lie*?

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: It doesn't matter. We shall make it true.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: But when she finds out that you have deceived her—

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: She will never find out. I shall warn him to hide away his amber watch charm.

MRS. DORCHESTER: Does he still wear it?

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: Yes; and many other charms, from *other* loves—They say he has been a great beau—

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: The outrageous flirt!

MRS. DORCHESTER: Poor dear Mrs. Blanchard. I thought she would die—I was afraid she was dying—I *had* to say something to bring her to.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: But what have you gained by these lies?

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: Does she not walk?

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER (*With awe*): Yes, it is a miracle.

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: Merely a miracle of the realization of love—

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: But it is built on a false belief. He has not been true to her.

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: Mrs. Payne-Dexter, I have never questioned the reality of any one's love for me. That which counts is, after all, only that which is in our own hearts. If Mrs. Blanchard is convinced of his love—that is all that is really necessary.

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: But when you marry him—

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: I shall not marry him—I shall only keep the pearls—

MRS. DORCHESTER: But if *you* love him—

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE: Well as for that—I, *always*, can find some one else—

MRS. DORCHESTER: Gracious, my wool is a mess!

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: You'd better give up knitting, Agnes, and turn to story-writing—you've quite surprised me with your sudden brilliancy. Bell-boy, you may have these glasses—

MRS. DORCHESTER: Your diamond, platinum lorgnette!

MRS. PAYNE-DEXTER: Hump! do you think *I* have to manufacture a love-affair to help me get rid of my glasses?

MRS. DORCHESTER (*Scarcely able to grasp the idea*): She walked without her cane!

MRS. COURTNEY-PAGE (*With a sentimental smile*): Oh! to stay young, one must love.

CURTAIN

THE MAN WHO COULDN'T SAY "NO"

By

CLAUDIA LUCAS HARRIS

CLAUDIA LUCAS HARRIS

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THE MAN WHO COULDN'T SAY "NO"

THE PRESENT. *Winter. Sunday in a small town.*
PLACE: *Settin'-room in Joe Stebbins' home.*

PEOPLE

JOE STEBBINS . . . a harness maker,—the "failure"
ABNER ELLIS his old-time friend
MUM Joe's crippled mother
HALLIE an orphan
EDDIE Joe's little son

(Joe and Abner are playing checkers at a table L. C. Mum sits in her new wheeled chair by the window R. Hallie is heard clearing away the dishes in the dining-room L. and singing snatches of old hymn tunes in a fresh happy voice. Eddie is watching the game from the back of the table.)

(Ab has Joe covered. Joe has one king in a corner where he can move only one way. Ab is closing in on him with his several kings.)

EDDIE (*Excitedly*): Jump 'im, paw! Jump 'im! Don't ye see?

JOE (*Good-naturedly*): Yes, son, I see. But I don't see as 'twould do me no good to jump 'im seein' as how he'd jump me right back again.

AB (*Chuckling*): Guess I got ye, Joe. You're done. Your little king ain't got no parade ground to exercise in no more.

JOE (*With a mock sigh*): The game's your'n, Abner. (*Abner marks it in note-book.*)

AB: That makes three. I'm a-goin' to skunk you this time!

JOE: Skunk away if ye kin. But you ain't done it to me yit.

EDDIE: Huh! 'F I couldn't play checkers no better'n you can, paw, I'd go soak m' head!

AB: Run away, Buddy. I reckon yer Pa'd git along jest as well 'thout your advice an' counsel.

JOE: Oh, he don't bother none. Pore little chap! Sunday's a lonesome day fer a little feller. (*Tries to stroke Eddie's hair while Abner is re-setting the board—the boy ungraciously ducks and swaggers up stage whistling.*)

HALLIE (*Calls from dining-room*): Come in, Eddie, and help me with the dishes, there's a good boy!

EDDIE: Aw, whad'ye take me for? I ain't a-goin' to do no girl's work. (*Exits whistling into dining-room.*)

JOE (*Chuckling*): Hear that? Ain't no sissy about that boy!

AB (*Dryly*): No, they ain't no sissy—likewise they ain't nothin' good to be said fer 'im neither. He's spoiled, Joe, jest spoiled, that's what he is.

JOE: I 'low I do spoil him considerable—but you know how I feel about the pore motherless little feller. He ain't to blame. It's my fault, I reckon—but—ever sence his maw left us—I ain't had the heart to punish him fer nothin'.

AB: Ye're too easy, Joe, that's what's the matter with you. It's been yer besettin' sin all yer life;

that's why you ain't never made no more of a success of yer harness-makin' business. Jes' cos you was so turned easy ye trusted ever' Tom, Dick and Harry who come in an' asked ye. An' now, yer business fallin' off on account o' these here motors bein' used fer ever'thing, ye never *will* 'mount to shucks.

JOE: Mebbe not, Abner, mebbe not. Anyways, I reckon I kin hang on till I raise an' eddicate the boy. They's this here place fer him—all clear. Aside from that, he'll haf to shift fer himself after I'm gone.

AB: Ye'd 'a' had more if ye hadn't allus been so dog-gone *easy*. I've knowed you, Joel Stebbins, sence we was kids together an' I never yit knowed you to hev the courage to say "no" t' nobody.

JOE: I reckon I've got along as well as most folks. We live comf'table—with an occasional luxury—like Mum's new wheel-chair.

AB: An' she ain't crazy 'out it, neither.

JOE: Oh, well, pore ole lady, she'll like it better when she gits used to it. It only come las' week.

AB: You can't tell me Mum'll ever adm't likin' anything as well as her ole wooden rocker.

JOE: Well, bein' old an' crippled up fer ten er fifteen year' don't calkilate to sweeten no one's disposition. It's yore move, Abner.

MUM (*Looking up from her Bible*): Air you two fool boys still gamblin'?

JOE: Yes, Mum. Ab's skinned me three times an' claims he's a-goin' to skunk me this'n.

MUM: Well, ye don't desERVE to win—gamblin' on the Lord's Day. Goodness knows, Joel, I tried to

raise you a Christian but it don't seem as if my lickin's took no good effect.

JOE (*Chuckling*): No, Mum, I allus was a bad egg. I reckon they ain't nothin' kin save me from everlastin' damnation. (*Ab and he chuckle.*)

MUM (*Indignantly*): Ain't nothin' to laff at as I kin see. 'Twon't be so funny, Abner Ellis, when you're seethin' in fire an' brimstun—payin' up fer yer meannesses hyar on airth.

AB: I know, Mum. I wasn't laffin' at what you thought. I was laffin' 'cause I got Joe in a cornder and he can't see no way out of it.

MUM (*Plaintively*): My talkin' don't do no good. The seeds fall on stony ground. No one can say I didn't warn ye!

AB: They sure can't. You be'n a human finger-post longer'n I kin remember—pointin' out the road they was goin' to most o' the folks around here.

JOE: Don't tease her, Ab. She's old an' a leetle childish, pore ole soul. She ain't got long t' stay.

AB: She stayed long enough to fix your life fer ye, Joe. If it hadn't be'n fer her—

JOE (*With a glance toward Mum*): Sh!

HALLIE (*Enters*): Uncle Joe, Mis' Hanna's at the back door and wants to borrow some coffee fer dinner.

JOE: Well, give her some, Hallie. You know it's all right with me.

HALLIE: I didn't know what to say—they's only enough for our breakfast, and the stores won't be open that early.

JOE: Well, let 'er have it. We kin drink tea—or

do without. She's a pore widder an' mebbe needs it more'n we do.

HALLIE: All right. Just as you say. (*Exits.*)

AB: Fer the land's sake, Joe Stebbins, ef you ain't—

MUM: What'd she want? What'd Hallie want?

JOE: Oh, nothin' much, Mum. Jes' one o' the neighbors wanted to borry somethin'.

MUM: Well, she can't hev it whatever 'tis. We're jes' run to death 'ith neighbors. Borry, borry, borry! An' never dream o' payin' back. You'll let me end my days in the pore-house yit.

JOE: Oh, guess not, Mum. We're a long ways from the pore-house. Paupers don't git no new wheel-chairs like you got las' week. (*Jumps three men more.*) That's one time I slipped one over on ye, Abner. (*Rubs his hands and chuckles while Ab runs his stubby fingers through his hair and wonders how it happened.*)

MUM: Humph! This blame contraption 'll be the death o' me yit. Never kin tell when it'll start a-rollin' and throw me out an' break m' neck. 'Tain't half so comfortable as my old rocker.

AB: 'Tain't? Joe, Mum wants her rocker. L's git it an' put her back in it an' set that no-'count veelocipede out on the porch. (*Starts up.*)

MUM: You set right still, Ab Ellis. Joe got this fer me an' I ain't goin' to be so ongrateful as not to use it ef it does nearly kill me to set in it an' if I am skeered t' death of it.

AB (*Reseating himself and chuckling*): She

wouldn't give up that comf'table wheel-chair fer a farm!

JOE: Oh, well, ole folks is queer. King, Ab! Crown him! (*Hallie comes galloping in—Eddie driving her by her apron strings.*)

EDDIE (*Hits her*): Giddap, giddap!

HALLIE (*Stopping*): Whoa! (*Above table.*)

EDDIE: Giddap! giddap! (*Whips her with stick he carries.*)

HALLIE: Keep still a minute, Eddie.

EDDIE: Well, go on, then.

JOE: Don't be so rough, Eddie.

HALLIE: Uncle Joe, there's a man at the back door—a tramp, I guess, says he's hungry.

JOE: (*Absorbed in game*): Give him somethin' t' eat, honey. You know I don't never turn no one away hongry.

HALLIE: But there's only some mashed taters left—and I was countin' on them fer tater cakes to-morrow. We et all the ham.

JOE: Give him the pertaters. We kin go 'thout—or cook some more. Ain't they *none* of the ham left?

HALLIE: Nope.

JOE: Fix up what ye kin. Pore feller, I expect he needs food wusser'n we do. Make him some coffee, Hallie.

HALLIE: Th' ain't none. Mis' Hanna borrowed it.

JOE: Oh, yes, that's so. Well, give 'im a cup o' tea or somethin'. Anything we've got.

HALLIE: All right.

EDDIE (*Hits her*): Giddap, giddap!

HALLIE: Eddie, behave! (*They exit.*)

AB: Now, Joe, if ye'd 'a' killed th' ole hen ye planned to hev for dinner they'd 'a' be'n plenty to feed yer tramp.

JOE: I suppose so. I'd oughta killed her. Pore ole thing! But I felt so sorry fer her—cluckin' away—with all her chicks took from her—that when I went out to ketch her an' wring her neck,—I jes' didn't have the heart. Smoke, Abner? (*Gets up—gets can of tobacco from shelf up back of stove. They fill pipes. Smoke and play, Mum coughs. Fans herself with handkerchief. Abner, unnoticed by Joe, blows smoke her way.*)

AB (*Referring to move he has just made*): I guess that'll hold you fer a while. Ye're so fresh with yer derved ole king.

MUM (*Fanning*): Pesky ole stinkin' pipes!

JOE (*Looking up*): What's the matter, Mum? Too strong fer you? Well, we'll quit. (*Pipe aside.*)

MUM: Never mind. Don't quit on my account. I'd leave the room ef I could—but I can't do nothin' but *set* like a dratted Chinese idol. (*Coughs.*)

AB (*Smoking*): Turn the wheel, Mum. You kin go wherever you want.

MUM: Eh?

AB: Turn the steerin' wheel.

MUM: I'm too old to learn new tricks. I wasn't cut out for a chuffer. I be'n helpless fer eleven years an' I reckon I'll continue so t' the day o' my death.

JOE: Want to go to your room, Mum? (*Rising.*)

MUM: I reckon I've set an' watched you gamblers on the Lord's Day an' inhaled yer smellin' ole pipes

long 'nough. (*Joe goes to move her.*) Let be! Let be! Where's that girl?

JOE (*Goes up L., calls*): Hallie, Hallie. Mum wants you.

HALLIE (*Enters wiping her arms*): What is it, Mum?

MUM: Take me into my room, Hallie. These men air a-gamblin' an' a-carryin' on. They'll be drinkin' next. (*Hallie wheels her grumbling into room C.*)

AB (*Referring to Hallie*): There's a good little gal.

JOE (*Resuming game*): She sure is. Just like a little sunbeam round the house. It was a lucky day fer me when I tuk that little orphan in my house.

AB (*Joking*): Jes' cause you "felt sorry fer the pore little thing" when her maw died.

JOE: She needed a home. Never had no paw, I guess, no one seemed to want her so, nacherally, I tuk her.

AB: *Nacherally.*

JOE: Don't be sourcastic, Abner. I didn't get sold that time. I dunno what I'd do 'thout her.

AB: Yes, she was a good investment. But it'd 'a' been the same if she hadn't. You wouldn't 'a' been no wiser. Mr. E. Z. Mark. That's what your name ought 'a' been, Joe.

JOE: Now, Abner, jes' 'cause we're sich old frien's—

AB: I'm privileged to roast you. That's what friends is fer, ain't they, to pint out yer faults?

JOE: If that's so, Ab, you sure been a good friend to me.

AB: My lord, you need it! You make me so durn mad, Joe—so durn mad—that sometimes I'm jest hoppin'.

JOE: Go on hoppin', Ab. No one minds it. 'S your move. (*Eddie comes in and gets in his father's way—leaning languidly against his arm.*)

EDDIE: Paw, I wanna go skatin'. Paw, can't I?

JOE: Not to-day, buddy. Sun's too warm. I'm 'fraid 'tain't safe.

EDDIE: Aw—paw.

JOE: Move around the table, son; you're crowdin' paw's arm.

EDDIE (*Moves to back of table. Whining*): Aw, paw, why can't I?

JOE: 'Tain't safe.

EDDIE: Jilly Baker's paw's let him go.

AB (*Cornering Joe*): Now whatcha goin' to do? (*Joe studies deeply.*)

EDDIE: Paw—can't I—huh?

JOE: Don't tease, sonny.

EDDIE: Well, *can't* I—paw? Huh? can't I? Oh, pl-e-ease—paw.

AB: Your paw said "no." Let that settle it.

EDDIE: You shet yer mouth. 'Tain't your put in.

AB: 'Tain't, eh? I'll show ye. (*Makes a grab for Eddie who eludes him to R. In the scuffle the checker-board is disarranged*). Now you played hell! You dog-goned little aggravatin' scamp! If I's yer paw I'd lam the life out o' you!

EDDIE (*Dancing and wriggling fingers to his nose*):

You ain't my paw, see? You ain't my paw. What-cha goin' to do about it?

AB (*Sitting*): You come pesterin' 'round here again an' I'll show ye!

EDDIE: Ho, yes, you will!

JOE: Eddie, now—behave yourself. This is the Sabbath Day. (*They reset the checkers.*) I reckon we'll hev to start fresh, Abner.

EDDIE (*On the back of Joe's chair*): Paw, *why* can't I go skatin'?

JOE: I told ye.

EDDIE (*Blubbing*): But *why* can't I? 'Tain't no fun setting' 'round the house all day?

JOE: Your move, Ab. Keep still, Eddie.

EDDIE: Jest a little while, paw. I won't go fur from the shore. I'll be jes' as careful. Can't I, paw, huh?

JOE (*Looking speculatively out of the window*): Well, now—I—

EDDIE (*With renewed animation*): Jest fer ten minutes? Huh? (*To R. of Joe.*)

JOE: Well, now, I dunno. (*Looks reflectively at Eddie.*)

AB: If 'tain't safe, Joe, tell him no an' be done with it. (*Eddie makes a face at Ab.*)

JOE: Oh, I don't ezzactly know it ain't safe. The sun's pretty warm to-day—

EDDIE (*At window*): The other boys is skatin'.

JOE: Well, run on fer a little while. Bundle up good—an' be careful.

EDDIE (*Cheerfully*): I will, paw. (*Up to hall tree —puts on cap and coat.*)

JOE (*Over his shoulder*): Put yer muffler 'round yer neck and pull yer cap down good over yer ears.

EDDIE: All right, I will. (*Goes out slamming the door.*)

AB (*Gets up—hands in pockets and stalks.*)

JOE: What's the matter? Tired?

AB: No, I ain't tired—*playin'*. But I *am* tired *playin'* with such a durn fool! I be'n a-comin' here Sundays to play checkers with you fer five years—ever since yer wife run away and lef' you; and ever' durn Sunday it's be'n the same thing. You don't put yer mind on the game—lettin' folks pull an' haul ye this way an' that! Joe Stebbins, can't ye never say "no" to nobody?

JOE: W'y, I reckon I *could*—but I *don't* usually.

AB (*Sarcastically*): No, you don't usually. The kid an' that ole woman—

JOE: Sh, Abner, Mum'll hear you!

AB: I don't keer a cuss who hears me! Pull an' haul ye aroun' by the nose! The neighbors impose on ye an' laff at ye behin' yer back! 'Cause ye're so cussed easy—so dog-gone "sorry" for ever'thing! Oh, you—you—make me sick! (*Stalks to the window and stands looking out.*)

JOE (*Up*): I'm sorry, Abner; if I affect you like that I shouldn't think ye'd come nigh me no more.

AB (*Wheeling*): But you know I will. I'll keep on a-comin' ever' Sunday till one er other of us is tuk. I like ye, Joe—you're m' best friend, but, my God, you do make me so mad! (*Tramps L.*)

JOE (*Getting tobacco and laughing*): Aw, come on. Fill up yer pipe again an' le's hev another game.

(Comes down and puts his hand on Ab's shoulder.)
I'll mind my knittin' this time—honest I will.

AB (*Sits grumbling*): That kid'll break yer heart yit, Joe—lettin' him run over you the way you do.

JOE (*Sits*): I guess my heart's pretty tough. It's stood a good lot o' strainin'.

AB: But some day she's all the apter to go pop 'count o' th' strainin' she's had.

JOE: I thought it was goin' to go pop sure, pardner, that time—when she—when June—left.

AB: Five years ago las' week. (*Sigh.*) 'T 'uz yer own fault, Joe.

JOE: What could I 'a' done?

AB: You could 'a' done what she wanted ye to—pulled up stakes an' went away to a big town where they'd 'a' been a chancet fer ye to make somethin' of yerself.

JOE: What'd I 'a' done with Mum?

AB: Took her with you—

JOE: But she wouldn't go.

AB: If she wouldn't go with you and June, let her set an' sulk it out. 'Twouldn't 'a' hurt her none. She'd 'a' been took care of.

JOE: No, I couldn't 'a' done that—an' her helpless an' all.

AB: No, you couldn't leave *her*. Instead you let yer young wife fret herself mos' to death—shet up here with a cantankerous ole woman an' a squallin' kid tel she jest couldn't stand it no longer.

JOE: It was her *duty* to *me*.

AB: An' what about your duty to her? With some girls it'd 'a' been all right, but June was different.

She didn't belong here in this little one-hoss town. She was meant for other things—she was capable—she could 'a' helped you make somethin' of yourself somers else.

JOE: Poor soul! I ain't blamin' her none. I know I wasn't a fit mate for her, so soft an' pretty an' gay. 'Twas like yokin' up a little Shetlan' pony an' a big farm-hoss to the same plough. Still, she hadn't ought 'a' done what she did to me an' the boy—

AB: She didn't leave ye fer no other man, did she?

JOE: No, she never done that.

AB: No! She just left because she couldn't stand it no longer. That ole woman's naggin'—an' settin' the boy up to all sorts of meanness—

JOE: Abner, Mum's old, an' she can't walk—

AB: I ain't sayin' she ain't ole, but it's my private opinion publicly expressed that she could 'a' walked years ago if she'd tried.

JOE: Abner, ain't that kinda un-Christian. You don't think Mum'd pretend—

AB: I don't think she's pertendin' *now*. But it's dollars to doughnuts pertendin' had a lot to do with makin' her as helpless as she is now. You know yourself Doc Sellers never could understand why she couldn't walk after her leg got healed.

JOE: Doc Sellers never was a very kind-hearted man. Allus short an' crabbed.

AB: Mebbeso, but he ain't no fool when it comes to human nature, an' I know he was puzzled some in Mum's case.

JOE: He never hinted to me—

AB: He wouldn't, knowin' it'd only hurt yer feelin's. (*Distant cries off R.*)

JOE: Well, le's drop it, Abner. Mum may have her faults but we got to make allowances. Let's have another game. (*They seat themselves.*)

AB (*Apologetically*): I can't help gittin' he't up when I see how her an' that kid puts it over on you, you pore ole easy-goin' goose, ye! 'F I didn't like ye so durn well I wouldn't say a word. You know that, don't ye?

JOE (*Grinning*): Shore. It's all right, Abner. I know I'm a dunce, so we'll call it square. (*They set the board.*) All done with the dishes, honey? (*Hallie comes in from L., her kitchen apron removed—and crosses to the window.*)

HALLIE: Yes, Uncle Joe, fer to-day. Sunday's a fine day fer me—only have to wash 'em twicet.

JOE: Pore women! Seems selfish in us men to take a day's rest when they never seem to git to.

AB: 'S good fer 'em, Joe. Keep's 'em out o' mischief to be busy. Don't it, Hallie?

HALLIE: I reckon. Still I don't think a day off now and then would hurt anybody.

JOE: Course it wouldn't. Uncle Abner's just pokin' fun. He ain't no tyrant. He voted fer women's suffrage.

HALLIE (*Surprised*): Did ye?

AB: G'wan now! Course I didn't. I don't want no petticoat gover'ment over me.

JOE: Ye don't? I betchye, Ab, if we had a woman marshal you'd be gittin' locked up oncet a week jest fer the fun of havin' her 'rest ye.

AB (*Indignantly*): Nothin' o' the sort. 'Sides no woman could arrest nobody. They'd be like you—too "sorry fer the pore feller." (*Chuckles.*)

HALLIE (*Hotly*): Uncle Joe's good. He's *really* sorry when he says he is. He's the best man on earth.

AB (*Applauds*): Votes fer Women! Votes fer Women! Hooray! Ye're some little champeen, Hallie.

JOE: That's right, Hallie; don't ye let no one pan yer Uncle Joe.

HALLIE (*Defiantly*): Don't intend to. (*Gets wraps.*) I'm a-goin' over to Wallace's fer a spell.

JOE: All right, Hallie. Move. Look out fer that man, Abner. (*Hallie exits R.*)

AB: I'm a-lookin' out. I like to git a rise out o' that kid. She's shore loyal to you.

JOE: Bless her little heart. She's a good child. (*Gets up to get a match—glances out of the window on his return.*) What's all the excitement?

AB: Where?

JOE: Down by the crick. Looks like they's something happened.

HALLIE (*Rushes in*): Uncle Joe! Uncle Joe! Some one's drown'd!

AB AND JOE: Drown'd? Who?

HALLIE: Oh, I don't know. (*Crying.*) I thought I heard 'em say—

JOE (*Up, takes her by shoulder*): Ye heard what! —Hallie!

HALLIE: Oh, Uncle Joe, come! come, quick! (*Runs out.*)

JOE: Great God—Eddie! (*Rushes out—Ab goes up and grabs wraps and after him.*)

AB: Here, Joe! Joe! Here, wait! It can't be him! (*Takes Joe's hat and coat and his own and goes out leaving the door open.*)

MUM (*Calls from her room*): Hallie! Hallie! (*Strikes on the door with her stick.*) Joe! Joe! Where air ye all? (*A fumbling—the door opens.*) Joe, where air ye? The door's open! All gone an' left the door open! An' lef' me t' git my death o' cold. What on airth's the matter? (*Struggles with chair and finally wheels it down—shuts door with stick—wheels to window.*) Drat the thing! What's goin' on? Land, what a crowd o' folks. (*Hallie rushes in leaving door open and dashes into Mum's room.*)

HALLIE (*Panting. Tearing blankets off bed*): Eddie fell in the crick! They just got him out! I guess he's drowned! (*Rushes out with blankets leaving the door open.*)

MUM (*Catching the excitement*): What? What? I can't hear a word you say! Land sakes! Shet the door! Have ye all gone crazy? Now how'm I goin' t' git this infernal contraption turned around to shet that door? Much they care ef I git my death o' cold, so long's they're comf'table. (*Struggles to turn chair. Hallie enters, then Joe with Eddie wrapped in blankets in his arms. Abner follows awed and silent. Hallie indicates Mum's room.*)

HALLIE: Lay him in there. I'll get some hot water. (*Darts into dining-room. Joe takes Eddie into Mum's room and lays him on the bed—a group of neighbors who have followed congregate outside the door and*

talk—a few edge into the room. The village doctor bustles through the crowd putting them aside bruskiy.)

DOCTOR: Now, then! Now, then! out of my way! *(Puts them out closing the door—goes into room—puts Joe kindly but firmly out. Abner remains in Mum's room with doctor—the door is closed—Joe staggers wearily down to right of the table and sits with his head on his arms.)*

MUM *(Who has been fidgeting and frantic with excitement)*: What's the matter, Joe? Joe! Air ye all crazy? *(Abner enters from room—comes down and puts his hand on Joe's shoulder—pats it a few times. There is a silence. Hallie hurries quietly into upper room, closing the door softly.)*

JOE *(Brokenly)*: It was my fault, Abner! All my fault! Oh, my God! what'd I ever let him go fer? Why can't I say "no"? I'm so weak! It's lost me ever'thing I ever had on airth.

AB: Not ever'thing, ole friend. *(Joe reaches up and clasps the hand on his shoulder.)* Besides we ain't sure—Doc may fetch him around all right.

JOE: I don't darst to hope. It's jedgment on me, Abner. I had it comin' to me. I ain't got no hope.

AB: Now, now, now, now! Brace up! I'll go see how things is gittin' on. Mebbe I kin be some help. *(Exits blowing nose loudly.)*

JOE: Oh, my God, give me a chance—give me a chance!

HALLIE *(Coming from room)*: He ain't dead! His eyes is openin'. *(Runs out left.)*

JOE: Alive! (*Rushes into upper room.*) Eddie!
Eddie!

MUM (*Who has caught a glimpse of Hallie*): Hallie! What under the sun is the matter, I ask ye. (*Abner enters.*) Hallie! Abner Ellis! Ef you don't speak up an' tell me I'll wrop this stick around your shins ef it's the last act of my life! (*Threatens him with cane.*)

AB (*At Mum's left—shouting*): Eddie broke through the ice!

(*Joe enters with Eddie in a blanket. Sits at table rocking him and murmuring over him—Hallie enters and speaks with doctor in room up R.*)

MUM: Mercy! He ain't drowneded, is he?

AB: No! (*Goes behind and a little to left of table.*)

MUM: No business foolin' on the ice on the Lord's Day. He'd oughta be spanked. What'd ye let him go fer, Joe?

JOE: 'Cause I'm a fool, Mum. 'Cause I couldn't say "no."

EDDIE (*Stirring in his blankets—weakly*): Paw!

JOE: Yes, honey. What does paw's pore little feller want?

EDDIE: Can't I never go skatin' no more just cause I fell in an' got all wet?

JOE (*Holding him closer*): Oh, don't talk about it, sonny.

EDDIE (*Weak but persistent*): But can't I?

JOE: No, buddy, not fer a long, long time.

EDDIE: How long? T'-morrow?

JOE: No, no!

EDDIE (*Whimpering*): Jes' fer a little while—a little, teeny while? Huh? Paw, can't I?

JOE (*Rocking him*): Sh! Sh! There, there, don't cry, honey. Paw'll see! (*Abner in despair turns up his collar—pulls his cap over his ears and is stalking toward the door disgustedly when the curtain falls.*)

SECOND CURTAIN: *Hallie is letting doctor out the door. Joe is rocking Eddie oblivious to all else. Mum with her Bible.*

THE DEACON'S HAT

From the volume of *Three Welsh Plays*

By

JEANNETTE MARKS

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Jeanette Marks received her A. B. and A. M. degrees from Wellesley. She is now Professor and Head of the Department of English Literature at Mount Holyoke. Miss Marks is well known not only as a lecturer and teacher, although there is many a student who keeps as among her most cherished memories the hours spent in Miss Marks' class room, but for her stories, novels, essays, poems, and short plays as well.

"Miss Marks knows and loves children; she is as good a playmate as she is a story-teller. Not only does she know how to write serious books for grown-ups; many a youngster has read *The Cheerful Cricket* and *Tommy Beaver Tails*, or the charming story-told science books of which she is the co-author."

Besides these several children's books and work for the magazines, Miss Marks has published *English Pastoral Drama, Through Welsh Doorways*, a volume of short stories; *The End of a Song*, a Welsh novel; *Gallant Little Wales*, a travel-book; *A Girl's Student Days and After* and *Vacation Camping for Girls*, in which she gives to girls the knowledge she has gained from many summers of "roughing it"; *Leviathan*, *Early English Hero Tales*, *Three Welsh Plays*, *Children in the Wood Stories*, *Geoffrey's Window*, and *Willow Pollen* (1921), a book of verse. Miss Marks will publish her first full length play in a few weeks, and she has in preparation more one-act Welsh plays.

The Welsh plays are perhaps the best known of Miss Marks' work. The author herself tells of the

beginning of her interest in Wales. "I saw some pictures of North Wales and the instant I saw these pictures I knew that I was going there. I went, and there I found my tongue and my pen, and I have gone back year after year in love still with Wales and the joy of learning how to write."

The original Welsh plays took the Welsh National Theatre first prize in 1911, and have been published separately and in many collections; they have also been used as a text for study in many school and college class rooms, among these Amherst, The University of Texas, The University of Nebraska, The University of Minnesota, etc. There have been a large number of productions of these Welsh plays in the United States.

THE DEACON'S HAT

This play is taken from a volume of three Welsh plays by Jeanette Marks, our only one-act plays representing the life and character of the Welshman. The characters tell subtle, humorous stories. In an unusual situation we see portrayed here the wit of man and woman pitted against each other. And probably Neli would have won had not the deacon's eloquence for a moment overcome her native shrewdness. Shall not "salvation" win over "soap" since "there's no money in theology"? At any rate the reader is content to leave the deacon unvanquished.

(Copyrighted. Applications to produce *The Deacon's Hat* should be addressed to the author's publishers, Little, Brown & Company, Boston, Massachusetts.)

THE DEACON'S HAT

CHARACTERS

DEACON ROBERTS, a stout oldish Welshman.

HUGH WILLIAMS, an earnest visionary young man
who owns Y Gegin.

NELI WILLIAMS, his capable wife.

MRS. JONES, THE WASH, a stout kindly woman who
wishes to buy soap.

MRS. JENKINS, THE MIDWIFE, after pins for her latest
baby.

TOM MORRIS, THE SHEEP, who comes to buy tobacco
and remains to pray.

SCENE: *A little shop called Y Gegin (The Kitchen)
in Bala, North Wales.*

TIME: *Monday morning at half-past eleven.*

*To the right is the counter of Y Gegin, set out with
a bountiful supply of groceries; behind the counter
are grocery-stocked shelves. Upon the counter is a
good-sized enamel-ware bowl filled with herring
pickled in brine and leek, also a basket of fresh eggs,
a jar of pickles, some packages of codfish, a half-dozen
loaves of bread, a big round cheese, several pounds of
butter wrapped in print paper, etc., etc.*

To the left are a cheerful glowing fire and ingle.

At the back center is a door; between the door and the fire stands a grandfather's clock with a shining brass face. Between the clock and the door, back center, is a small tridarn (Welsh dresser) and a chair. From the rafters hang flitches of bacon, hams, bunches of onions, herbs, etc. On either side of the fireplace are latticed windows, showing a glimpse of the street. Before the fire is a small, round three-legged table, beside it a tall straight-backed chair.

Between the table and left is a door which is the entrance to Y Gegin and from which, on a metal elbow, dangles a large bell.

At rise of curtain Hugh Williams enters at back center, absorbed in reading a volume of Welsh theological essays. He is dressed in a brightly striped vest, a short, heavy cloth coat, cut away in front and with lapels trimmed with brass buttons, swallowtails behind, also trimmed with brass buttons, stock wound around his neck, and tight trousers down to his boot tops.

Neli Williams, his wife, a comely, capable young woman, busy with her knitting every instant she talks, is clad in her market costume, a scarlet cloak and a tall black Welsh beaver. Over her arm is an immense basket.

NELI (*Commandingly*): Hughie, put down that book!

HUGH (*Still going on reading*): Haven't I just said a man is his own master, whatever!

NELI: Hughie, ye're to mind the shop while I'm gone!

HUGH (*Patiently*): Yiss, yiss.

NELI: I don't think ye hear a word I am sayin' whatever.

HUGH: Yiss, I hear every word ye're sayin'.

NELI: What is it then?

HUGH (*Weakly*): 'Tis all about—about—the—the weather whatever!

NELI: Ye've not heard a word, an' ye're plannin' to read that book from cover to cover, I can see.

HUGH (*A little too quickly*): Nay, I have no plans— (*He tucks book away in back coat pocket over-hastily.*)

NELI: Hugh!

HUGH (*Weakly*): Nay, I have no plans whatever!

NELI (*Reproachfully*): Hugh—ie! 'Twould be the end of sellin' anythin' to anybody if I leave ye with a book whatever! Give me that book!

HUGH (*Obstinately*): Nay, I'll no read the book.

NELI: Give me that book!

HUGH (*Rising a little*): Nay. I say a man is his own master whatever!

NELI (*Finding the book hidden in his coat-tail pocket*): Is he? Well, I'll no leave ye with any masterful temptations to be readin'.

HUGH: Ye've no cause to take this book away from me.

NELI (*Opens book and starts with delight*): 'Tis Deacon Roberts' new book on *The Flamin' Wickedness of Babylon*. Where did ye get it?

HUGH (*Reassured by her interest*): He lent it to me this morning.

NELI (*Resolutely*): Well, I will take it away from ye this noon till I am home again whatever!

HUGH (*Sulkily*): Sellin' groceries is not salvation. They sold groceries in Babylon; Deacon Roberts says so.

NELI (*Looking at book with ill-disguised eagerness*): I dunno as anybody ever found salvation by givin' away all he had for nothin'! 'Tis certain Deacon Roberts has not followed that way.

HUGH (*Still sulkily*): A man is his own master, I say.

NELI (*Absent-mindedly, her nose in the book*): Is he? Well, indeed!

HUGH (*Crossly*): Aye, he is. (*Pointedly*): An' I was not plannin' to give away the book whatever.

NELI (*Closing volume with a little sigh as for stolen delights and speaking busily*): An' I am not talkin' about acceptin' books but about butter an' eggs an' cheese an' all the other groceries!

HUGH: Aye, ye'll get no blessin' from such worldliness.

NELI (*Absent-mindedly*): Maybe not, but ye will get a dinner from that unblessed worldliness an' find no fault, I'm thinkin'. (*Her hand lingering on the book which she opens.*) But such wonderful theology! An' such eloquence! Such an understandin' of sin! Such glowin' pictures of Babylon!

HUGH: Aye, hot! I tell ye, Neli, there's no man in the parish has such a gift of eloquence as Deacon Roberts or such theology. In all Wales ye'll not find stronger theology than his.

NELI: Ye have no need to tell me that! (*Looking for a place in which to hide the book until she returns.*) Have I not a deep an' proper admiration for theology? Have I not had one minister an' five deacons an' a revivalist in my family, to say nothin' at all of one composer of hymns?

HUGH: Yiss, yiss. Aye, 'tis a celebrated family. I am no sayin' anythin' against your family.

NELI: Then what?

HUGH (*Pleadingly*): Deacon Roberts has great fire with which to save souls. We're needin' that book on Babylon's wickedness. Give it back to me, Neli!

NELI: Oh, aye! (*Looks at husband.*) I'm not sayin' but that ye are wicked, Hugh, an' needin' these essays, for ye have no ministers and deacons and hymn composers among your kin.

HUGH (*Triumphantly*): Aye, aye, that's it! That's it! An' the more need have I to read till my nostrils are full of the smoke of—of Babylon.

NELI (*Absent-mindedly tucking book away on shelf as she talks*): Aye, but there has been some smoke about Deacon Roberts' reputation which has come from some fire less far away than Babylon.

HUGH: What smoke?

NELI (*Evasively*): Well, I am thinkin' about my eggs which vanished one week ago to-day. There was no one in that mornin' but Deacon Roberts. Mrs. Jones the Wash had come for her soap an' gone before I filled that basket with eggs.

HUGH (*Watching her covertly, standing on tiptoe and craning his neck as she stows away book*): Yiss, yiss!

NELI (*Slyly*): Ask Deacon Roberts if cats steal eggs whatever?

HUGH (*Repeating*): If cats steal eggs, if cats steal eggs.

NELI: Aye, not if eggs steal cats.

HUGH (*Craning neck*): Yiss, yiss, if eggs steal cats!

NELI: Hugh—ie! Now ye'll never get it correct again! 'Tis if cats steal eggs.

HUGH (*Sulkily*): Well, I'm no carin' about cats with heaven starin' me in the face.

(Neli turns about swiftly with the quick sudden motions characteristic of her, and Hugh shrinks into himself. She shakes her finger at him and goes over to kiss him.)

NELI: Hughie lad, ye're not to touch the book while I am gone to market.

HUGH: Nay, nay, certainly not!

NELI: And ye're to be on the lookout for Mrs. Jones the Wash, for Mrs. Jenkins the Midwife—Jane Elin has a new baby, an' it'll be needin' somethin'. (*Pointing to counter*): Here is everythin' plainly marked. Ye're not to undersell or give away anythin'. D' ye hear?

HUGH: Aye, I hear!

NELI: An' remember where the tobacco is, for this is the day Tom Morris the Sheep comes in.

HUGH: Aye, in the glass jar.

NELI: Good-by. I will return soon.

HUGH (*Indifferently*): Good-by.

(Neli leaves by door at back center. Immediately

Hugh steals toward the shelves where she hid the book.)

NELI (*Thrusting head back in*): Mind, Hughie lad, no readin'—nay, not even any theology!

HUGH (*Stepping quickly away from shelves and repeating parrot-like*): Nay, nay, no readin', no sermons, not even any theology!

NELI: An' no salvation till I come back! (*She smiles, withdraws head, and is gone. Hugh starts forward, collides clumsily with the counter in his eagerness, knocks the basket of eggs with his elbow, upsetting it. Several eggs break. He shakes his head ruefully at the mess and as ruefully at the counter. He finds book and hugs it greedily to him.*)

HUGH (*Mournfully*): Look at this! What did I say but that there was no salvation sellin' groceries! If Neli could but see those eggs! (*He goes behind counter and gets out a box of eggs, from which he refills the basket. The broken eggs he leaves untouched upon the floor. He opens his volume of sermons and seats himself by a little three-legged table near the fire. He sighs in happy anticipation. Hearing a slight noise, he looks suspiciously at door, gets up, tiptoes across floor to street door, and locks it quietly. An expression of triumph overspreads his face.*) Ha, if customers come, they will think no one is at home whatever, an' I can read on! (*He seats himself at little three-legged table, opens volume, smooths over its pages lovingly, and begins to read slowly and halting over syllables.*) "The smoke of Ba-by-lon was hot—scorchin' hot. An' 'twas filled with Ba-ba-ba-baal stones, slimy an' scorchin' hot also—" (*There is the*

sound of feet coming up the shop steps, followed by a hand trying the door-knob. Hugh looks up from his sermons, an expression of innocent triumph on his face. The door-knob is tried again, the door rattled. Then some one rings the shop door-bell.)

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*Calling*): Mrs. Williams, mum, have ye any soap? (*No answer. Calling*): Mrs. Williams! Mrs. Williams!

(*Hugh nods approvingly and lifts his volume to read.*)

MRS. JONES THE WASH: Where are they all whatever? I will just look in at the window. (*A large kindly face is anxiously flattened against the window. At that Hugh drops in consternation under the three-legged table.*) Uch, what's that shadow skippin' under the table? No doubt a rat after the groceries. Mrs. Williams, mum, Mrs. Williams! Well, indeed they're out. (*She pounds once more on the door with a heavy fist, rings, and then goes. Suddenly the door back center opens, and Neli Williams appears.*)

NELI (*She does not see Hugh and peers around for him*): What is all that bell-ringing about? (*Hugh crawls out from under table.*)

HUGH: Hush, she's gone!

NELI (*Amazed and whispering to herself*): Under the table!

HUGH (*Rising and putting up his hand as a sign for her to keep silent*): Nay, 'twas Mrs. Jones the Wash come to buy her soap whatever!

NELI: Aye, well, why didn't she come in whatever?

HUGH (*Whispering*): I locked the door, Neli, so I could finish readin' those essays whatever! An'

then she looked in at the window, an' I had to get under the table.

NELI (*Indignantly*): Locked the door against a customer, an' after all I said! An' crawled under a table! Hugh Williams, your wits are goin' quite on the downfall!

HUGH (*In a whisper*): Aye, but, Neli, those essays—an' I thought ye had gone to market.

NELI: I had started, but I came back for my purse. Put down that book!

HUGH: Aye, but, Neli—

NELI (*Angrily*): Much less of heaven an' much more of earth is what I need in a husband! Ye have sent away a customer; very like Mrs. Jones the Wash after soap will go elsewhere.

HUGH: Aye, but, Neli—

(*Steps are heard approaching.*)

NELI: Get up! Some one is coming.

(*Hugh gets up very unwillingly.*)

HUGH (*Whispering still*): Aye, but, Neli—

NELI (*Angrily*): Put down that book, I say! (*She crunches over some eggshells.*) Eggs? Broken?

HUGH (*Putting down book*): Aye, Neli, my elbow an' the eggs in Babylon—

NELI (*Sarcastically*): Aye, I see beasts in Babylon here together,—doleful creatures smearin' one an' six-pence worth of eggs all over the floor. An' a half dozen eggs gone last week. (*Wiping up eggs.*) An' I'm to suppose Babylon had something to do with that half dozen eggs, too? They were put in the basket after Mrs. Jones the Wash had left whatever, an' before Deacon Roberts came.

HUGH: Neli, I did not say—

NELI (*Still angrily*): Well, indeed, unlock that door!

HUGH (*Going to unlock door*): But, Neli—

NELI (*Disappearing through door back center*): Not a word! Your mind has gone quite on the downfall—lockin' doors against your own bread and butter an' soap.

HUGH (*Unlocking door sullenly*): But, Neli, salvation an' soap—

NELI (*Snappingly*): Salvation an' soap are as thick as thieves.

HUGH: But, Neli, a man is his own master.

NELI: Yiss, I see he is! (*Neli goes out, slamming door noisily.*)

HUGH: Dear anwyl, she seems angry! (*Hugh opens street door left just as Neli goes out through kitchen, by door back center. Deacon Roberts enters the door Hugh has unlocked. He looks at Hugh, smiles, and goes over to counter in a businesslike way. He is a stout man, dressed in a black broadcloth cut-away coat, tight trousers, a drab vest, high collar and stock, woolen gloves, a muffler wound about his neck and face, and a tall Welsh beaver hat. Under his arm he carries a book.*)

DEACON ROBERTS (*Speaking affectionately, pulling off his gloves, putting down book on counter, and beginning eagerly to touch the various groceries*): Essays on Babylon to-day, Hughie lad?

HUGH (*Looking about for Neli and speaking fretfully*): Nay.

DEACON ROBERTS (*Unwinding his muffler*): Ye look as if ye had been in spiritual struggle.

HUGH (*Drearily*): I have.

DEACON ROBERTS: Well, indeed, Hughie, 'tis neither the angel nor the archfiend here now, nor for me any struggle except the struggle to both live an' eat well—ho! ho! an' eat well, I say—in Bala. (*Laughs jovially.*) Ho! ho! not bad, Hughie lad,—live an' eat in Bala!

HUGH (*Patiently*): With that muffler around your head, Deacon, ye are enough to frighten the devil out of Babylon.

DEACON ROBERTS (*Unwinding last lap of muffler*): Yiss, yiss, Hughie lad. But I dunno but ye will understand better if I call myself, let us say the angel with the sickle—ho! ho!—not the angel of fire, Hughie, but the angel with the sharp sickle gatherin' the clusters of the vines of the earth. (*Sudden change of subject.*) Where is Neli?

HUGH (*Vacantly*): I dunno—yiss, yiss, at market.

DEACON ROBERTS (*Chuckling*): Dear, dear, at market—a fine day for marketing! An' my essays on the Flamin' Wickedness of Babylon, Hughie lad, how are they? Have ye finished them?

HUGH: Nay, not yet.

DEACON ROBERTS (*Looking over counter, touching one article after another as he mentions it.*) Pickled herrin'—grand but wet! Pickles—dear me, yiss, Neli's—an' good! Butter from Hafod-y-Porth—sweet as honey! (*He picks up a pat of butter and sniffs it, drawing in his breath loudly. He smiles with delight and lays down the butter. He takes off his hat*

and dusts it out inside. He puts his hat back on his head, smiles, chuckles, picks up butter, taps it thoughtfully with two fingers, smells it and puts down the pat lingeringly. He lifts up a loaf of Neli Williams' bread, glancing from it to the butter.) Bread! Dear me! *(His eyes glance on to codfish.)* American codfish, *(picks up package and smacks his lips loudly)* dear anwyl, with potatoes—*(reads)* "Gloucester." *(Reaches out and touches eggs affectionately.)* Eggs—are they fresh, Hugh?

HUGH *(Dreamily)*: I dunno. But I broke some of them. They might be! *(Looks at floor.)*

DEACON ROBERTS: Were they fresh?

HUGH: I dunno.

DEACON ROBERTS *(Sharply)*: Dunno? About eggs? *(Picks up egg.)*

HUGH *(Troubled)*: Neli's hens laid them.

DEACON ROBERTS: I see, Neli's hens laid 'em, an' you broke 'em! Admirable arrangements! *(Putting down the egg and turning toward the cheese, speaks on impatiently.)* Well, indeed, then, were the hens fresh?

HUGH *(More cheerful)*: Yiss, I think. Last week the basket was grand an' full of fresh eggs, but they disappeared, aye, they did indeed.

DEACON ROBERTS *(Starts)*: Where did they go to?

HUGH *(Injured)*: How can I say? I was here, an' I would have told her if I had seen, but I did not whatever. Neli reproves me for too great attention to visions an' too little to the groceries.

DEACON ROBERTS *(Chuckling)*: Aye, Hughie lad, such is married life! Let a man marry his thoughts

or a wife, for he can not have both. I have chosen my thoughts.

HUGH: But the cat—

DEACON ROBERTS (*Briskly*): Aye, a man can keep a cat without risk.

HUGH: Nay, nay, I mean the cat took 'em. I dunno. That's it—(*Hugh clutches his head, trying to recall something.*) Uch, that's it! Neli told me to remember to ask ye if ye thought eggs could steal a cat whatever.

DEACON ROBERTS (*Puzzled*): Eggs steal a cat?

HUGH (*Troubled*): Nay, nay, cats steal an egg?

DEACON ROBERTS (*Startled and looking suspiciously at Hugh*): Cats? What cats?

HUGH (*With solemnity*): Aye, but I told Neli I'm no carin' about cats with heaven starin' me in the face. Deacon Roberts, those essays are grand an' wonderful.

DEACON ROBERTS (*Relieved*): Yiss, yiss! Hughie lad, theology is a means to salvation an' sometimes to other ends, too. But there's no money in theology. (*Sighs.*) And a man must live! (*Points to corroded dish of pickled herring, sniffing greedily.*) Dear people, what beautiful herrin'! (*Wipes moisture away from corners of his mouth and picks up a fish from dish, holding it, dripping, by tail.*) Pickled?

HUGH (*Looking at corroded dish*): Tuppence.

DEACON ROBERTS (*Shortly*): Dear to-day.

HUGH (*Eying dish dreamily*): I dunno. Neli—

DEACON ROBERTS (*Eyes glittering, cutting straight through sentence and pointing to cheese*): Cheese?

HUGH: A shill', I'm thinkin'.

DEACON ROBERTS: A shillin', Hugh? (*Deacon Roberts lifts knife and drops it lightly on edge of cheese. The leaf it pares off he picks up and thrusts into his mouth, greedily pushing in the crumbs. Then he pauses and looks slyly at Hugh.*) Was it sixpence ye said, Hugh?

HUGH (*Gazing toward the fire and the volume of essays*): Yiss, sixpence, I think.

DEACON ROBERTS (*Sarcastically*): Still too dear, Hugh!

HUGH (*Sighing*): I dunno, it might be dear. (*With more animation*): Deacon, when Babylon fell—

DEACON ROBERTS (*Wipes his mouth and, interrupting Hugh, speaks decisively*): No cheese. (*He removes his tall Welsh beaver hat, mops off his bald white head, and, pointing up to the shelves, begins to dust out inside of hatband again but with a deliberate air of preparation.*) What is that up there, Hughie lad?

HUGH (*Trying to follow the direction of the big red wavering forefinger*): Ye mean that? A B C In-fants' Food, I think.

DEACON ROBERTS (*Giving his hat a final wipe*): Nay, nay, not for me, Hughie lad! Come, come, brush the smoke of burnin' Babylon from your eyes! In a minute I must be goin' back to my study, whatever. An' I have need of food!

(*Hugh takes a chair and mounts it. The Deacon looks at Hugh's back, puts his hand down on the counter, and picks up an egg from the basket. He holds it to the light and squints through it to see*

whether it is fresh. Then he turns it lovingly over in his fat palm, makes a dexterous backward motion and slides it into his coat-tail pocket. This he follows with two more eggs for same coat tail and three for other—in all half a dozen.)

HUGH (*Dreamily pointing to tin*): Is it Yankee corn?

DEACON ROBERTS (*To Hugh's back and slipping in second egg*): Nay, nay, not that, Hughie lad, that tin above!

HUGH (*Absent-mindedly touching tin*): Is it ox tongue?

DEACON ROBERTS (*Slipping in third egg and not even looking up*): Ox tongue, lad? Nay, nothin' so large as that.

HUGH (*Dreamily reaching up higher*): American condensed m-m-milk? Yiss, that's what it is.

DEACON ROBERTS (*Slipping in fourth egg*): Condensed milk, Hughie? Back to infants' food again.

HUGH (*Stretching up almost to his full length and holding down tin with tips of long white finger*): Kippert herrin'? Is it that?

DEACON ROBERTS (*Slipping in fifth egg*): Nay, nay, a little further up, if you please.

HUGH (*Gasping, but still reaching up and reading*): Uto—Uto—U-to-pi-an Tinned Sausage. Is it that?

DEACON ROBERTS (*Slipping in sixth egg with an air of finality and triumph, and lifting his hat from the counter*): Nay, nay, not that, Hughie lad. Why do ye not begin by askin' me what I want? Ye've no gift for sellin' groceries whatever.

HUGH (*Surprised*): Did I not ask ye?

DEACON ROBERTS: Nay.

HUGH: What would Neli say whatever? She would never forgive me.

DEACON ROBERTS (*Amiably*): Well, I forgive ye, Hughie lad. 'Tis a relish, I'm needin'!

HUGH (*Relieved*): Well, indeed, a relish! We have relishes on that shelf above, I think. (*Reaches up but pauses helplessly.*) I must tell Neli that these shelves are not straight. (*Dizzy and clinging to the shelves, his back to the Deacon.*)

DEACON ROBERTS (*Picking up a pound of butter wrapped in print paper*): Is it up there?

HUGH: No, I think, an' the shelves are not fast whatever. I must tell Neli. They go up like wings. (*Trying to reach a bottle just above him.*) Was it English or American?

DEACON ROBERTS (*Putting the pound of butter in his hat and his hat on his head*): American, Hughie lad.

(*At that instant there is a noise from the inner kitchen, and Neli Williams opens the door. The Deacon turns, and their glances meet and cross. Each understands perfectly what the other has seen. Neli Williams has thrown off her red cloak and taken off her Welsh beaver hat. She is dressed in a short full skirt, white stockings, clogs on her feet, a striped apron, tight bodice, fichu, short sleeves, and white cap on dark hair.*)

NELI (*Slowly*): Uch! The Deacon has what he came for whatever!

HUGH (*Turning to contradict his wife*): Nay, Neli,—(*Losing his balance on chair, tumbles off, and, with arm flung out to save himself, strikes dish of*

pickled herring. The herring and brine fly in every direction, spraying the Deacon and Hughie; the bowl spins madly, dipping and revolving on the floor. For a few seconds nothing is audible except the bowl revolving on the flagstones and Hugh picking himself up and sneezing behind the counter.) Achoo! Achoo! Dear me, Neli—achoo!

NELI (*Going quickly to husband and beginning to wipe brine from husband's forehead and cheeks; at the same time has her back to the Deacon and forming soundless letters with her lip, she jerks her head toward the Deacon*): B-U-T-T-E-R!

HUGH (*Drearily*): Better? Aye, I'm better. It did not hurt me whatever.

NELI (*Jerking head backward toward Deacon Roberts and again forming letters with lips*): B-U-T-T-E-R!

HUGH: What, water? Nay, I don't want any water.

DEACON ROBERTS (*Coughing, ill at ease and glancing suspiciously at bowl that has come to rest near his leg.*) Ahem! 'Tis cold here, Mrs. Williams, mum, an' I must be moving' on.

NELI (*Savagely to Deacon*): Stay where ye are whatever!

DEACON ROBERTS (*Unaccustomed to being spoken to this way by a woman*): Well, indeed, mum, I could stay, but I'm thinkin' 'tis cold an'—I'd better go.

NELI (*Again savagely*): Nay, stay! Stay for—for what ye came for whatever! (*Neli looks challengingly at the Deacon. Then she goes on wiping brine carefully from husband's hair and from behind*

his ears. The Deacon coughs and pushes bowl away with the toe of his boot.)

DEACON ROBERTS (*Smiling*): 'Tis unnecessary to remain then, mum.

NELI (*To Hugh*): What did he get?

HUGH (*Sneezing*): N—n—achoo!—nothin'!

DEACON ROBERTS (*With sudden interest looking at the floor*): Well, indeed!

NELI (*Suspiciously*): What is it?

(He reaches down with difficulty to a small thick puddle on the floor just beneath his left coat tail. He aims a red forefinger at it, lifts himself, and sucks fingertip.)

DEACON ROBERTS (*Smiling*): Ahem, Mrs. Williams, mum, 'tis excellent herrin' brine! *(From the basket on the counter he picks up an egg which he tosses lightly and replaces in basket.)* A beautiful fresh egg, Mrs. Williams, mum. I must be steppin' homeward.

HUGH (*Struggling to speak just as Neli reaches his nose, wringing it vigorously as she wipes it*): Aye, but, Neli, I was just tellin' ye when I fell that I could not find the Deacon's relish—uch, achoo! achoo!

DEACON ROBERTS (*With finality, tossing the egg in air, catching it and putting it back in basket*): Well, indeed, mum, I must be steppin' homewards now. *(Neli's glance rests on fire burning on other side of room. She puts down wet cloth. She turns squarely on the Deacon.)*

NELI: What is your haste, Mr. Roberts? Please to go to the fire an' wait! I can find the relish.

DEACON ROBERTS (*Hastily*): Nay, nay, mum. I

have no need any more— (*Coughs.*) Excellent herrin' brine. (*Goes toward door.*)

NELI (*To Hugh*): Take him to the fire, Hugh. 'Tis a cold day whatever! (*Insinuatingly to Deacon*): Have ye a reason for wantin' to go, Mr. Roberts?

DEACON ROBERTS (*Going*): Nay, nay, mum, none at all! But, I must not trouble ye. 'Tis too much to ask, an' I have no time to spare an'—

NELI (*Interrupting and not without acerbity*): Indeed, Mr. Roberts, sellin' what we can is our profit. (*To Hugh, who obediently takes Deacon by arm and pulls him toward fire*): Take him to the fire, lad. (*To Deacon*): What kind of a relish was it, did ye say, Mr. Roberts?

DEACON ROBERTS (*Having a tug of war with Hugh*): 'Tis an Indian relish, mum, but I can not wait.

HUGH (*Pulling harder*): American, ye said.

DEACON ROBERTS (*Hastily*): Yiss, yiss, American Indian relish, that is.

NELI: Tut, 'tis our specialty, these American Indian relishes! We have several. Sit down by the fire while I look them up. (*Wickedly*): As ye said, Mr. Roberts, 'tis cold here this morning.

DEACON ROBERTS: There, Hughie lad, I must not trouble ye. (*Looks at clock.*) 'Tis ten minutes before twelve, an' my dinner will be ready at twelve. (*Pulls harder.*)

NELI (*To Hugh*): Keep him by the fire, lad.

DEACON ROBERTS: There, Hughie lad, let me go! (*But Hugh holds on, and the Deacon's coat begins to come off.*)

NELI (*Sarcastically*): The relish—American Indian, ye said, I think,—will make your dinner taste fine and grand!

DEACON ROBERTS (*Finding that without leaving his coat behind he is unable to go, he glowers at Hugh and speaks sweetly to Neli*): 'Tis a beautiful clock, Mrs. Williams, mum. But I haven't five minutes to spare.

NELI (*Keeping a sharp lookout on the rim of the Deacon's hat*): Well, indeed, I can find the relish in just one minute. An' ye'll have abundance of time left.

DEACON ROBERTS (*Trapped and gazing at clock with fine air of indifference*): 'Tis a clever, shinin' lookin' clock whatever, Mrs. Williams, mum.

NELI: Have ye any recollection of the name of the maker of the relish, Mr. Roberts?

DEACON ROBERTS (*Putting his hands behind him anxiously and parting his freighted coat tails with care; then, revolving, presenting his back and one large well-set bright-colored patch to the fire*): Nay, I have forgotten it, Mrs. Williams, mum.

NELI: Too bad, but I'm sure to find it. (*She mounts upon chair. At this moment the shop door-bell rings violently, and there enters Mrs. Jones the Wash, very fat and very jolly. She is dressed in short skirt very full, clogs on her feet, a bodice made of striped Welsh flannel, a shabby kerchief, a cap on her head, and over this a shawl. Neli turns her head a little.*) Aye, Mrs. Jones the Wash, in a minute, if you please. Sit down until I find Deacon Roberts' relish whatever.

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*Sits down on chair by door back center and folds her hands over her stomach*): Yiss, yiss, mum, thank you. I've come for soap. I came once before, but no one was in.

NELI: Too bad!

MRS. JONES THE WASH: An' I looked in at the window an' saw nothin' but a skippin' shadow, looked like a rat. Have ye any rats, Mrs. Williams, mum, do ye think?

NELI: Have I any rats? Well, indeed, 'tis that I'm wantin' to know, Mrs. Jones the Wash.

MRS. JONES THE WASH: Well, I came back, for the water is eatin' the soap to-day as if 'twere sweets—aye, 'tis a very meltin' day for soap! (*Laughs.*)

DEACON ROBERTS: 'Tis sweet to be clean, Mrs. Jones the Wash.

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*Laughing*): Yiss, yiss, Deacon Roberts, there has many a chapel been built out of a washtub, an' many a prayer risen up from the suds!

DEACON ROBERTS (*Solemnly*): Aye, Mrs. Jones the Wash, 'tis holy work, washin' is very holy work.

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*Touched*): Yiss, yiss, I thank ye, Deacon Roberts.

DEACON ROBERTS: Well, I must be steppin' homeward now.

NELI (*Firmly*): Nay, Mr. Roberts, I am searchin' on the shelf where I think that American Indian relish is. Ye act as if ye had some cause to hurry, Mr. Roberts. Wait a moment, if you please.

DEACON ROBERTS: Well, indeed, but I am keepin' Mrs. Jones the Wash waitin'!

NELI (*To Mrs. Jones*): Ye are in no haste?

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*Thoroughly comfortable and happy*): Nay, mum, no haste at all. I am havin' a rest, an' 'tis grand an' warm here whatever.

NELI (*Maliciously to Deacon*): Does it feel hot by the fire?

DEACON ROBERTS (*Experiencing novel sensations on the crown of his bald head*): Mrs. Williams, mum, 'tis hot in Y Gegin, but as with Llanycil Churchyard, Y Gegin is only the portal to a hotter an' a bigger place where scorchin' flames burn forever an' forever. Proverbs saith, 'Hell an' destruction are never full.' What, then, shall be the fate of women who have no wisdom, Mrs. Williams, mum?

NELI (*Searching for relish*): Aye, what? Well, indeed, the men must know.

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*Nodding her head appreciatively at Hugh*): Such eloquence, Mr. Williams! Aye, who in chapel has such grand theology as Deacon Roberts! (*She sighs. The bell rings violently again, and Tom Morris the Sheep enters. He is dressed in gaiters, a shepherd's cloak, etc., etc. He carries a crook in his hand. He is a grizzle-haired, rosy-faced old man, raw-boned, strong and awkward, with a half-earnest, half-foolish look.*)

NELI (*Looking around*): Aye, Tom Morris the Sheep, come in an' sit down. I am lookin' out an American Indian relish for the Deacon.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP: Yiss, mum. I am wantin' to buy a little tobacco, mum. 'Tis lonely upon the hillsides with the sheep, whatever.

DEACON ROBERTS (*Hastily*): I must go now, Mrs. Williams, mum, an' ye can wait on Tom Morris.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP: Nay, nay, Mr. Roberts, sir, there is no haste.

NELI (*To Tom Morris*): Sit down there by the door, if you please. (*Tom Morris seats himself on other side of door by back center.*)

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP: Yiss, mum. (*Touches his forelock to Mrs. Jones the Wash.*) A grand day for the clothes, Mrs. Jones, mum.

MRS. JONES THE WASH: Yiss, yiss, an' as I was just sayin' 'tis a meltin' day for the soap!

NELI (*Significantly*): An' perhaps 'tis a meltin' day for somethin' besides soap! (*She looks at Deacon.*)

HUGH (*Earnestly*): Yiss, yiss, for souls, meltin' for souls, I am hopin'. (*Picking up the book from the little three-legged table, and speaking to the Deacon*): They are enlargin' the burial ground in Llanycil Churchyard—achoo! achoo!

DEACON ROBERTS (*Slyly moving a step away from fire*): They're only enlargin' hell, Hughie lad, an' in that place they always make room for all. (*He casts a stabbing look at Neli.*)

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*Nodding head*): True, true, room for all! (*Chuckling*): But 'twould be a grand place to dry the clothes in!

DEACON ROBERTS (*Severely*): Mrs. Jones, mum, hell is paved with words of lightness.

HUGH (*Looking up from book, his face expressing delight*): Deacon Roberts, I have searched for the

place of hell, but one book sayeth one thing, an' another another. Where is hell?

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP: Aye, where is hell?

(*The bell rings violently. All start except Neli. Mrs. Jenkins the Midwife enters. She is an old woman, white-haired and with a commanding, somewhat disagreeable expression on her face. She wears a cloak and black Welsh beaver and walks with a stick.*)

NELI: Yiss, yiss, Mrs. Jenkins the Midwife, I am just lookin' out a relish for the Deacon. Sit down by the fire, please.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE (*Seating herself on other side of fire*): Aye, mum, I've come for pins; I'm in no haste, mum.

NELI: Is it Jane Elin's baby?

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE: Aye, Jane Elin's, an' 'tis my sixth hundredth birth.

HUGH: We're discussing the place of hell, Mrs. Jenkins, mum.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE: Well, indeed, I have seen the place of hell six hundred times then. (*Coughs and nods her head up and down over stick.*) Heaven an' hell I'm thinkin' we have with us here.

HUGH: Nay, nay, how could that be? Tell us where is the place of hell, Deacon Roberts. (*All listen with the most intense interest.*)

DEACON ROBERTS (*Nodding*): Aye, the place of hell—(*Stopping suddenly, a terrified look on his face, as the butter slides against the forward rim of his hat, almost knocking it off, then going on with neck*

rigid and head straight up)—to me is known where is that place—their way is dark an' slippery; they go down into the depths, an' their soul is melted because of trouble.

NELI (*Pausing skeptically*): Aye, 'tis my idea of hell whatever with souls meltin', Mr. Roberts.

HUGH (*Tense with expectation*): Tell us where is that place!

DEACON ROBERTS (*Neck rigid, head unmoved and voice querulous*): Yiss, yiss. (*Putting his hand up and letting it down quickly.*) Ahem! Ye believe that it rains in Bala?

HUGH (*Eyes on Deacon in childlike faith*): I do.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE: Yiss, yiss, before an' after every birth whatever!

MRS. JONES THE WASH: Yiss, yiss, who would know better than I that it rains in Bala?

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP: Aye, amen, it rains in Bala upon the hills an' in the valleys.

DEACON ROBERTS: Ye believe that it can rain in Bala both when the moon is full an' when 'tis new?

HUGH (*Earnestly*): I do.

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*Wearily*): Yiss, any time.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP: Aye, all the time.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE: Yiss, yiss, it rains ever an' forever!

NELI (*Forgetting the relish search*): Well, indeed, 'tis true it can rain in Bala at any time an' at all times.

DEACON ROBERTS (*Paying no attention to Neli*): Ye believe that Tomen-y-Bala is Ararat?

HUGH (*Clutching his book more tightly and speaking in a whisper*): Yiss.

MRS. JONES THE WASH: Aye, 'tis true.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE: Yiss, the Hill of Bala is Ararat.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP: Yiss, I have driven the sheep over it whatever more than a hundred times.

NELI (*Both hands on counter, leaning forward, listening to Deacon's words*): Aye, Charles-y-Bala said so.

DEACON ROBERTS (*Still ignoring Neli and lowering his coat tails carefully*): Ye believe, good people, that the Druids called Noah "Tegid," an' that those who were saved were cast up on Tomen-y-Bala?

HUGH: Amen, I do!

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE (*Nodding her old head*): Aye, 'tis true.

MRS. JONES THE WASH: Yiss, yiss.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP: Amen, 'tis so.

DEACON ROBERTS (*Moving a few steps away from the fire, standing sidewise, and lifting hand to head, checking it in mid-air*): An' ye know that Bala has been a lake, an' Bala will become a lake?

HUGH: Amen, I do!

NELI (*Assenting for the first time*): Yiss, 'tis true—that is.

MRS. JONES THE WASH: Dear anwyl, yiss!

DEACON ROBERTS (*With warning gesture toward window*): Hell is out there—movin' beneath Bala Lake to meet all at their comin'. (*Raises his voice suddenly.*) Red-hot Baal stones will fall upon your heads—Baal stones. Howl, ye! (*Shouting loudly.*)

Meltin' stones smellin' of the bullocks. Howl, ye sinners! (*Clasping his hands together desperately.*) Scorchin' hot—Oo—o—o—Howl, ye!—howl, ye! (*The Deacon's hat sways, and he jams it down more tightly on his head. Unclasping his hands and as if stirring up the contents of a pudding dish.*) Round an' round like this! Howl, ye sinners, howl! (*All moan and sway to and fro except Neli.*)

NELI (*Skeptically*): What is there to fear?

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE (*Groaning*): Nay, but what is there not to fear?

MRS. JONES THE WASH: Aye, outermost darkness. Och! Och!

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP: Have mercy!

DEACON ROBERTS (*Shouting again*): Get ready! Lift up your eyes! (*Welsh beaver almost falls off and is set straight in a twinkling.*) Beg for mercy before the stones of darkness burn thee, an' there is no water to cool thy tongue, an' a great gulf is fixed between thee an' those who might help thee!

NELI (*Spellbound by the Deacon's eloquence and now oblivious to hat, etc.*): Yiss, yiss, 'tis true, 'tis very true! (*She steps down from chair and places hands on counter.*)

DEACON ROBERTS (*His face convulsed, shouting directly at her*): Sister, hast thou two eyes to be cast into hell fire?

NELI (*Terrified and swept along by his eloquence*): Two eyes to be burned? (*All lower their heads, groaning and rocking to and fro.*)

DEACON ROBERTS (*The butter trickling down his face, yelling with sudden violence*): Hell is here an'

now. Here in Bala, here in Y Gegin, here with us! Howl, ye! Howl, ye sinners! (*All moan together.*)

HUGH (*Whispering*): Uch, here!

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE: Yiss, here!

MRS. JONES THE WASH: Yiss.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP (*Terrified*): Aye. Amen! Yiss!

NELI (*Whispering*): Here in Y Gegin!

DEACON ROBERTS (*Clapping his hands to his face*): Stones of Baal, stones of darkness, slimy with ooze, red-hot ooze, thick vapors! Howl, ye, howl, ye sinners! (*All moan and groan. Takes a glance at clock, passes hand over face and runs on madly, neck rigid, eyes staring, fat red cheeks turning to purple.*) Midday, not midnight, is the hour of Hell; its sun never sets! But who knows when comes that hour of Hell?

NELI (*Taking hands from counter and crossing them as she whispers*): Who knows?

ALL (*Groaning*): Who knows?

HUGH (*Voice quavering and lifting his Welsh essays*): Who knows?

DEACON ROBERTS (*Big yellow drops pouring down his face, his voice full of anguish*): I will tell ye when is the hour of Hell. (*He points to the clock.*) Is one the hour of Hell? Nay. Two? Nay. Three? No, not three. Four? Four might be the hour of Hell, but 'tis not. Five? Nor five, indeed. Six? Nay. Seven? Is seven the hour, the awful hour? Nay, not yet. Eight? Is eight the hour—an hour bright as this bright hour? Nay, eight is not. (*The Deacon shouts in a mighty voice and points with*

a red finger at the clock.) 'Tis comin'! 'Tis comin', I say! Howl, ye, howl! Only one minute more! Sinners, sinners, lift up your eyes! Cry for mercy! (*All groan.*) Cry for mercy! When the clock strikes twelve, 'twill be the hour of Hell! Fix your eyes upon the clock! Watch! Count! Listen! 'Tis strikin'. The stroke! The hour is here!

(All, dropped on their knees and turned toward the clock, their backs to the street door, are awaiting the awful stroke. The book has fallen from Hugh's hands. Neli's hands are clenched. Mrs. Jenkins the Midwife is nodding her old head. Mrs. Jones the Wash, on her knees, her face upturned to the clock, is rubbing up and down her thighs as if at the business of washing. Tom Morris the Sheep is prostrate and making a strange buzzing sound between his lips. The wheels of the clever old timepiece whir and turn. Then in the silent noonday the hard striking begins: One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, Nine, Ten, Eleven, Twelve.)

DEACON ROBERTS (*Yelling suddenly in a loud and terrible voice*): Hell let loose! Howl, ye! Howl, ye sinners! (*All cover their eyes. All groan or moan. The clock ticks, the flame in the grate flutters, Neli's bosom rises and falls heavily.*) Lest worse happen to ye, sin no more! (*The Deacon looks at them all quietly. Then he lifts his hands in sign of blessing, smiles and vanishes silently through street door. All remain stationary in their terror. Nothing happens. But at last Neli fearfully, still spellbound by the Deacon's eloquence, lifts her eyes to the clock. Then*

cautiously she turns a little toward the fire and the place of Deacon Roberts.

NELI: Uch! (*She stands on her feet and cries out*): The Deacon is gone!

HUGH (*Raising his eyes*): Uch, what is it? Babylon—

NELI: Babylon nothing! (*She wrings her hands.*)

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE (*Groaning*): Is he dead? Is he dead?

NELI (*With sudden plunge toward the door*): Uch, ye old hypocrite, ye villain! Uch, my butter an' my eggs, my butter an' my eggs! (*Neli throws open the door and slams it to after her as she pursues the Deacon out into the bright midday sunshine.*)

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE: Well, indeed, what is it? Has she been taken?

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*Getting up heavily*): Such movin' eloquence! A saintly man is Deacon Roberts!

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP: Aye, a saintly man is Deacon Roberts!

HUGH (*Picking up his book and speaking slowly*): Aye, eloquence that knoweth the place of Hell even better than it knoweth Bala whatever!

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE (*Very businesslike*): Aye, 'twas a treat—a rare treat! But where's my pins now?

MRS. JONES THE WASH (*Very businesslike*): Yiss, yiss, 'twas a grand an' fine treat. But I'm wantin' my soap now.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP: Have ye any tobacco, Hughie lad?

CURTAIN

T H E E X C H A N G E

A COMIC-FARCE

By

ALTHEA THURSTON

Written as a requirement of English 109—Playwriting
and Dramatic Technique of the One-Act Play—under
Professor B. Roland Lewis. Head of the English
Department of The University of Utah

ALTHEA THURSTON

Althea Thurston (Mrs. Walter R. Thurston) is a resident of Salt Lake City, Utah, and is a thoroughly western woman. She received her academic education in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and has spent several years in Texas and Arizona. She received her technical training in playwriting at the University of Utah, and has just completed at that institution a very thoroughgoing course in the development of the English drama covering a period from the earliest liturgical plays through contemporary drama.

While Mrs. Thurston is interested in the creative aspect of both poetry and short stories, it is to the drama that she is giving her particular attention. *The Exchange* was first produced in October, 1919, by the Ogden Dramatic Club, who played it before the state convention of the Federation of Women's Clubs in Salt Lake City. It has since been frequently played by schools and clubs. Mrs. Thurston is also the author of *When a Man's Hungry*, *And the Devil Laughs*,—one-act plays,—*The Trail Blazers*, a pageant-drama, and *A Pageant of Spring*, which was presented on the campus of the University of Utah by the summer school students of public speaking and interpretative dancing in July, 1920.

THE EXCHANGE

Like the short story the short play would teach as well as entertain. And we can not feel that such a

play as this *preaches*, hence its lesson is the greater. In the words of Professor B. Roland Lewis "*The Exchange* deals with a very fundamental observation of life, and is presented in concrete form—two essentials for a good play."

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THE EXCHANGE

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JUDGE, the Exchanger of Miseries.

IMP, office boy to the Judge.

A POOR MAN.

A VAIN WOMAN.

A RICH CITIZEN.

SCENE: *The curtain rises upon an office scene. There is nothing unusual about this office: it has tables, chairs, a filing cabinet and a hat rack. A portion of the office is railed off at the right. Within this enclosed space is a commodious desk and swivel chair, and the filing cabinet stands against the wall. This railed off portion of the office belongs, exclusively, to the Judge. Here he is wont to spend many hours—sometimes to read or write—and again, perhaps, he will just sit and ponder upon the vagaries of mankind. The Judge is a tall spare man with rather long gray hair which shows beneath the skull cap that he always wears. When we first see him, he is reading a letter, and evidently he is not pleased, for he is tapping with impatient fingers upon his desk.*

At the left of the stage is a heavily curtained door which leads to an inner room. At center rear is another door which evidently leads to the street, as it is through this door that the Poor Man, the Vain Woman, and the Rich Citizen will presently enter,

each upon his special quest. The hat rack stands near the street door and we glimpse a soft black hat and a long black overcoat hanging upon it.

Down stage to the left, is a flat topped desk, littered with papers and letters. This desk has two large drawers wherein a number of miscellaneous articles might be kept. It is at this desk that we catch our first glimpse of Imp. He is busily writing in a huge ledger and he seems to be enjoying his work for he chuckles the while. Imp is a little rogue—looks it and acts it, and we feel that he has a Mephistophelian spirit. He wears a dark green tight-fitting uniform trimmed with red braid. His saucy little round cap is always cocked over one eye. He is ever chuckling impishly, and we feel that he is slyly gleeful over the weaknesses of mankind and the difficulties that beset them.

IMP (*Throws down his pen, chuckles, and half standing on the rungs of his chair and balancing himself against his desk, surveys the ledger*): Your Honor, I've all the miseries listed to date and a fine lot there is to choose from. Everything from bunions to old wives for exchange.

JUDGE (*Scowls and impatiently taps the letter he is reading*): Here is another one. A woman suspects her husband of a misalliance. Wants to catch him, but is so crippled with rheumatism she can't get about. Wants us to exchange her rheumatism for something that won't interfere with either her walking or her eyesight.

IMP (*Referring to the ledger and running his finger*

along the lines): We have a defective heart or a lazy liver we could give her.

JUDGE (*Irritably tossing the letter over to Imp*): She would not be satisfied. People never are. They always want to change their miseries but never their vices. Each thinks his own cross heavier than others have to bear. But he is very willing to make light his own shortcomings and weaknesses. He thinks they are not half so bad as his neighbors'. I have tried for years to aid distressed humanity, but I can't satisfy them. I am growing tired of it all, Imp. People need a lesson and they're going to get it, too. I am going to—

(*Knock is heard at the street door. Judge sighs, turns to his desk and begins to write. Imp closes the ledger and goes to answer the knock.*)

IMP: Here comes another misery.

(*Imp opens the door to admit the Poor Man who is very shabbily dressed. He hesitates, looks around the room as if he were in the wrong place and then addresses Imp in a loud whisper.*)

POOR MAN (*Indicating the Judge with a motion of his head*): Is that him?

IMP (*Whispering loudly his reply*): Yes, that is His Honor.

POOR MAN (*Still whispering and showing signs of nervousness*): Do I dare speak to him?

IMP (*Enjoying the situation and still whispering*): Yes, but be careful what you say.

POOR MAN (*Takes off his hat, approaches slowly to the railing and speaks humbly*): Your Honor, I —

(*Swallows hard, clears throat.*) Your Honor, I've a little favor—to ask of you.

JUDGE (*Looking coldly at the Poor Man*): Well?

POOR MAN: You see, Your Honor, I've been poor all my life. I've never had much fun. I don't ask for a lot of money, But — I would like enough so that I could have some swell clothes, and — so that I could eat, drink and be merry with the boys. You know, I just want to have a good time. Do you think you could fix it for me, Judge?

JUDGE (*Gazing at him sternly for a moment*): So you just want to have a good time. Want me to take away your poverty. I suppose you have no moral weakness you want to change, no defects in your character that you want to better?

POOR MAN (*Stammering and twirling his hat*): Why, w-h-y, Judge, I—I am not a bad man. Of—of course I have my faults, but then—I've never committed any crimes. I guess I stack up pretty fair as men go. I'm just awful tired of being poor and never having any fun. Couldn't you help me out on that point, Judge?

JUDGE (*Sighs wearily and turns to Imp*): Bring me the ledger. (*Imp gives him the ledger in which he has been writing. Judge opens it and then speaks sharply to the Poor Man.*) You understand do you, my good man, that if I take away your poverty and and give you enough money for your good time, you will have to accept another misery?

POOR MAN (*Eagerly*): Yes, Your Honor, that's all right. I'm willing.

JUDGE (*Scanning ledger*): Very well. Let us see. Here is paralysis.

POOR MAN (*Hesitatingly*): Well, I—I couldn't have a—very good time, if—if I was paralyzed.

JUDGE (*Shortly*): No. I suppose not. How about a glass eye?

POOR MAN (*Anxiously*): Please, Your Honor, if I'm going to have a good time I need two good eyes. I don't want to miss anything.

JUDGE (*Wearily turning over the leaves of the ledger*): A man left his wife here for exchange, perhaps you would like her.

POOR MAN (*Shifting from one foot to the other and nervously twirling his hat*): Oh, Judge, oh, no, please no. I don't want anybody's old cast-off wife.

JUDGE (*Becoming exasperated*): Well, choose something and be quick about it. Here is lumbago, gout, fatness, old age, and —

IMP (*Interrupting and walking quickly over to the railing*): Excuse me, Judge, but maybe the gentleman would like the indigestion that Mr. Potter left when he took old Mrs. Pratt's fallen arches.

POOR MAN (*Eagerly*): Indigestion? Sure! That will be fine! I won't mind a little thing like indigestion if I can get rid of my poverty.

JUDGE (*Sternly*): Very well. Raise your right hand. Repeat after me. "I swear to accept indigestion for better or for worse as my portion of the world's miseries, so help me God."

POOR MAN (*Solemnly*): "I swear to accept indigestion for better or for worse as my portion of the world's miseries, so help me God."

JUDGE (*To Imp*): Show this gentleman to the changing room. (*Poor Man follows Imp who conducts him to the heavily curtained door. The Poor Man throws out his chest and swaggers a bit as a man might who had suddenly come into a fortune. Imp swaggers along with him.*)

IMP: Won't you have a grand time though? I'll get you a menu card so that you can be picking out your dinner.

POOR MAN (*Joyfully slapping Imp on the back*): Good idea, and I'll pick out a regular banquet. (*Pausing a moment before he passes through the curtains, he smiles and smacks his lips in anticipation. Exit.*)

JUDGE (*Speaks disgustedly to Imp*): There you are! He's perfectly satisfied with his morals. Has no defects in his character. Just wants to have a good time. (*Sighs heavily and turns back to his writing. Imp nods his head in agreement and chuckles slyly.*)

(*The street door opens slowly and the Vain Woman stands upon the threshold. She does not enter at once but stands posing,—presumably she desires to attract attention, and she is worthy of it. She has a superb figure and her rich gowning enhances it. Her fair face reveals a shallow prettiness, but the wrinkles of age are beginning to leave telltale lines upon its smoothness. As Imp hurries forward to usher her in, she sweeps grandly past him to the center of the stage. Imp stops near the door with his hands on his hips staring after her, then takes a few steps in imitation of her. She turns around slowly and saun-*

tering over to the railing, coughs affectedly, and as the Judge rises and bows curtly, she speaks in a coaxing manner.)

VAIN WOMAN: Judge, I have heard that you are very kind, and I have been told that you help people out of their troubles, so I have a little favor to ask of you.

JUDGE (*Coldly*): Yes, I supposed so, go on.

VAIN WOMAN (*Archly*): Well, you know that I am a famous beauty, in fact both my face and my form are considered very lovely. (*She turns around slowly that he may see for himself.*) Great and celebrated men have worshiped at my feet. I simply can not live without admiration. It is my very life. But, Judge, (*plaintively*) horrid wrinkles are beginning to show in my face. (*Intensely*): Oh, I would give anything, do anything, to have a smooth, youthful face once more. Please, oh, please, Judge, won't you take away these wrinkles (*touching her face with her fingers*) and give me something in their stead?

JUDGE (*Looking directly at her and speaking coldly*): Are you satisfied with yourself in other ways? Is your character as beautiful as your face? Have you no faults or weaknesses that you want exchanged?

VAIN WOMAN (*Uncertainly*): Why, I—don't know what you mean. I am just as good as any other woman and lots better than some I know. I go to church, and I subscribe to the charities and I belong to the best clubs. (*Anxiously*): Oh, please, Judge, it's these wrinkles that make me so unhappy. Won't

you exchange them; you don't want me to be unhappy do you? Please take them away.

JUDGE (*Wearily looking over the ledger*): Oh, very well, I'll see what I can do for you. (*To Imp*): Fetch a chair for this lady. (*Imp gives her a chair and she sits facing front. Imp returns to his desk, perches himself upon it and watches the Vain Woman interestedly. Judge turns over the leaves of the ledger.*) I have a goiter that I could exchange for your wrinkles.

VAIN WOMAN (*Protestingly, clasping her hands to her throat*): Oh, heavens, no! That would ruin my beautiful throat. See (*throwing back her fur and exposing her neck in a low cut gown*) I have a lovely neck. (*Imp makes an exaggerated attempt to see.*)

JUDGE (*Glances coldly at her and then scans ledger again*): Well, how about hay fever?

VAIN WOMAN (*Reproachfully*): Oh, Judge, how can you suggest such a thing! Watery eyes and a red nose, the worst enemy of beauty there is. I simply couldn't think of it. I want something that won't show.

JUDGE (*Disgustedly turns to filing cabinet and looks through a series of cards, withdraws one and turns to Vain Woman*): Perhaps this will suit you. (*Refers to card.*) A woman has grown very tired of her husband and wants to exchange him for some other burden.

VAIN WOMAN (*Indignantly*): What! I accept a man that some other woman doesn't want! Certainly not! I prefer one that some other woman does want.

JUDGE (*Irritated, puts the card back in its place and turns upon the Vain Woman crossly*): I fear that I can not please you and I do not have time to—

IMP (*Interrupts and runs over to the railing, speaking soothingly to the Judge*): Excuse me, Judge, but maybe the lady would like deafness in exchange for her wrinkles. Deafness wouldn't show, so it couldn't spoil her face or her elegant figure.

JUDGE (*Wearily*): No, it won't show. Deafness ought to be a good thing for you.

VAIN WOMAN (*Consideringly*): Why—yes,—that might do. But—well, it wouldn't show. I've a notion to take it. (*Pause, she seems to consider and meditate. The Judge stares at her coldly. Imp grins impudently. She rises leisurely, sighs.*) All right. I'll accept it.

JUDGE (*Sharply*): Hold up your right hand. (*She raises hand.*) Do you swear to accept deafness for better or for worse as your portion of the world's miseries, so help you God?

VAIN WOMAN (*Sweetly*): Oh, yes. I do, Judge.

JUDGE (*To Imp*): Show the lady to the changing room.

IMP (*Escorts her to the curtained door with rather mock deference*): No, deafness won't show at all, and you'll have 'em all crazy about you. (*Draws aside curtains for her to pass.*) Take second booth to your right. (*Vain Woman stands posing a moment, she smiles radiantly and pats her cheeks softly with her hands, then with a long drawn sigh of happiness, she exits. Imp bows low and mockingly after her vanishing form, his hands on his heart.*)

JUDGE (*Sarcastically*): Do her faults or shortcomings trouble her? Not at all! Perfectly satisfied with herself except for a few wrinkles in her face. Vain woman, bah!

IMP: Yes, sir, women have queer notions. (*An imperative rap at the street door, immediately followed by the rapper's abrupt entrance. We see an important-appearing personage. His arrogant bearing and commanding pose lead us to believe that he is accustomed to prompt attention. It is the Rich Citizen, exceedingly well groomed. His manner is lordly, but he addresses the Judge in a bored tone. When Imp scampers to meet him, the Rich Citizen hands him his hat and cane and turns at once to the Judge. Imp examines the hat and cane critically, hangs them on the hat rack, and returns to his desk where he again perches to watch the Rich Citizen.*)

RICH CITIZEN (*Lighting a cigarette*): I am addressing the Judge, am I not?

JUDGE (*Shortly*): You are.

RICH CITIZEN (*Languidly, between puffs of his cigarette*): Well, Judge, life has become rather bore-some, so I thought I would drop in and ask you to do me a small favor.

JUDGE (*Wearily*): Yes? Well, what is your grievance?

RICH CITIZEN (*Nonchalantly*): Oh, I wouldn't say grievance exactly. You see, my dear Judge, it is this way. I am a very rich and influential citizen, a prominent member of society, and I am very much sought after.

JUDGE (*Frigidly*): Oh, indeed!

RICH CITIZEN (*In a very bored manner*): Yes. Women run after me day and night. Ambitious mothers throw their marriageable daughters at my head. Men seek my advice on all matters. I am compelled to head this and that committee. (*Smokes languidly.*)

JUDGE (*Sharply*): Well, go on.

RICH CITIZEN: Really, Judge, my prestige has become a burden. I want to get away from it all. I would like to become a plain ordinary man with an humble vocation, the humbler the better, so that people will cease bothering me.

JUDGE (*Sarcastically*): Is your prestige all that troubles you? Don't worry about your morals I suppose. Satisfied with your habits and character?

RICH CITIZEN (*Coldly*): What have my habits or morals got to do with my request? (*Scornfully*): Certainly I am not one of your saintly men. I live as a man of my station should live, and I think I measure up very well with the best of them. I am simply bored and I would like a change. I would like to be a plain man with an humble calling.

JUDGE (*Ironically*): I'll see what we have in humble callings. (*He looks at the ledger, turning the leaves over slowly.*) We have several bartender's vocations.

RICH CITIZEN (*Wearily smoking*): No. Too many people about all the time, and too much noise.

JUDGE: Well, here's a janitor's job open to you.

RICH CITIZEN (*Impatiently throwing away his cigarette*): No. I don't like that either. Too confining. Too many people bickering at you all the

time. I want to get out in the open away from crowds.

JUDGE (*Sighing and turning over the leaves of the ledger, then hopefully*): Here's the very thing for you then,—postman in a rural district.

RICH CITIZEN (*Showing vexation*): No, no, NO. Too many old women that want to gossip. I tell you I want to get away from women. Haven't you something peaceful and quiet; something that would take me out in the quiet of the early morning when the birds are singing?

JUDGE (*Closing ledger with a bang and rising*): Well, you're too particular and I have not time to bother with you. I bid you good after—

IMP (*Slides from his desk, runs to railing, and speaks suavely*): Excuse me, Judge, but maybe the gentleman would like the vocation of milkman. That is early morning work. And you remember a milkman left his job here when he took that old worn-out senator's position.

JUDGE (*Sharply to Rich Citizen*): Well, how about it? Does a milkman's vocation suit you? It's early morning hours, fresh air, and no people about.

RICH CITIZEN (*Musingly*): Well, the very simplicity and quietness of it is its charm. It rather appeals to me. (*He ponders a moment*): Yes, by Jove, I'll take it.

JUDGE (*Sternly*): Hold up your right hand. (*Hand is raised.*) Do you solemnly swear to accept for better or for worse the vocation of milkman as your lot in life, so help you God?

RICH CITIZEN: I do.

JUDGE (*To Imp*): Show this gentleman to the changing room.

IMP (*While escorting him to the curtained door*): Yes, sir, you will lead the simple life. Fresh air, fresh milk, no people, just cows and they can't talk. (*Holding aside the curtains.*) Third booth, sir.

RICH CITIZEN (*Musingly*): The simple life,—peace and quietness. (*Exit.*)

JUDGE (*In disgust*): It's no use, Imp. They all cling to their vices, but they are very keen to change some little cross or condition that vexes them,—or that they think vexes them.

IMP: It's funny that people always want something different from what they have. (*Imp opens a drawer in his desk and takes out a bottle, evidently filled with tablets, which he holds up, shaking it and chuckling. He hunts in the drawer again and this time brings forth a huge ear trumpet which he chucklingly places on his table beside the bottle of tablets.*)

JUDGE: Don't let any more in, Imp. I can't stand another one to-day. I am going to write a letter and then go home.

IMP: All right, sir.

JUDGE: I am feeling very tired; what I really need is a vacation. A sea trip would put me right. By the way, Imp, where is that Trans-Atlantic Folder that I told you to get?

(*Imp picks up the Folder from his desk and takes it to the Judge who studies it attentively. Imp returns to his own desk where he again looks in a*

drawer and brings forth a menu card which he glances over, grinning mischievously.

(The former Poor Man reenters from the changing room. He is well dressed, and taking a well filled wallet from his pocket, he looks at it gloatingly. However, from time to time, a shade of annoyance passes over his face, and he puts his hand to the pit of his stomach. Imp runs to meet him and hands him the menu that he has been reading.)

IMP: Here's a menu from the Gargoyle. Say, you sure do look swell! (Looking him over admiringly.)

FORMER POOR MAN (Grinning happily): Some class to me now, eh! (Looking at menu): And you watch me pick out a real dinner. (Sits down at left front.) First, I'll have a cocktail; then, let's see, I'll have—another one. Next, oysters, and (he frowns and presses his hand to the pit of his stomach keeping up a massaging motion) green turtle soup, sand dabs, —chicken breasts—(they become absorbed over the menu.

(The Vain Woman reenters from the changing room. She now has a smooth face, and she is looking at herself in a hand glass, smiling and touching her face delightedly. She walks over to the railing and leans over it to the Judge. He looks up questioningly.)

VAIN WOMAN (Smiling): Oh, I am so happy again. Am I not beautiful?

JUDGE (Pityingly): You are a vain, foolish woman.

VAIN WOMAN: (Since she is deaf, she does not hear his words, but thinks he is complimenting her.

She smiles at him coyly.) Ah, Judge, you too are susceptible to my charms.

(The Judge in great exasperation puts away his papers, thrusts the Trans-Atlantic Folder in his pocket, hastily closes his desk and hurries to the hat rack, puts on his overcoat, slips his skull cap in his pocket and puts on his soft black hat. Then with a shrug of his shoulders and a wave of his hand indicative of disgust, he slips quietly out.

(The Vain Woman saunters past the former Poor Man, stops near him posing, and begins to put on her gloves. He looks at her admiringly, then getting to his feet, makes an elaborate but awkward bow.)

FORMER POOR MAN: Excuse me, lady, but I've had a big piece of luck to-day and I want to celebrate, so I am having a big dinner. Won't you join me and help me have a good time?

VAIN WOMAN *(Looking at him blankly and trying to fathom what he has said)*: Oh, why, what did you say?

FORMER POOR MAN *(Hesitating and a bit surprised)*: Why,—er,—I said that I had a big piece of luck to-day and I am going to celebrate. I am having a fine dinner, and I just asked if—if—you wouldn't have dinner with me.

VAIN WOMAN *(Still looking blank and a little confused, then smiling archly and acting as though she had been hearing compliments, she speaks affectedly)*: Really, do you think so? *(Looking down and smoothing her dress)*: But then every one tells me that I am.

FORMER POOR MAN (*Puzzled, turns to Imp for help*): Just what is her trouble, Nut?

IMP (*Secretly gleeful*): She is stone deaf. You had better write it.

FORMER POOR MAN: Never! No deaf ones for me. (*Turns away and consults menu again. Vain Woman poses and frequently looks in hand glass to reassure herself.*

(*Former Rich Citizen reenters from the changing room. He is dressed in shabby overalls, jumper and an old hat. He has a pipe in his mouth. He walks arrogantly over to the former Poor Man and addresses him.*)

FORMER RICH CITIZEN: Give me a light.

FORMER POOR MAN (*Trying to live up to his fine clothes and wallet full of money, looks the former Rich Citizen over snubbingly*): Say, who do you think you are? You light out, see?

FORMER RICH CITIZEN (*Very much surprised, stands nonplussed a moment*): Well, upon my word, I—I—(*He stops short in his speech, walks haughtily over to the railing where he stands glowering at the former Poor Man. The Former Poor Man starts for the street door, but Imp runs after him, waving the bottle of tablets.*)

IMP: I'll sell you these for two bits.

FORMER POOR MAN: What is that?

IMP (*Grinning*): Indigestion tablets.

FORMER POOR MAN (*Puts his hand to his stomach and laughs a little lamely*): Keep 'em; I don't need 'em. (*Exit.*)

(Vain Woman fastens her fur and starts for the street door, giving the Former Rich Citizen a snubbing look as she passes him. Imp stops her and offers the ear trumpet.)

IMP: You might need this; I'll sell it for a dollar.

(She does not hear what he says but she looks her scorn at the ear trumpet and walks proudly out.)

FORMER RICH CITIZEN *(Fumbling at his pocket as if to find a watch)*: Boy, what time is it; I haven't my watch.

IMP *(Grinning mischievously)*: Time to milk the cows.

(The former Rich Citizen starts angrily toward Imp, then evidently thinking better of it, shrugs his shoulders and stalks majestically to the street door. He pauses with it partly open, turns as if to speak to Imp, drawing himself up haughtily—a ludicrous figure in his shabby outfit—then he goes abruptly out, slamming the door. Imp doubles himself up in a paroxysm of glee as the curtain falls.)

SCENE II

(A fortnight has passed. The curtain rises upon the same stage setting. The Judge is not about, but we see Imp asleep in a chair. All seems quiet and serene but suddenly the street door opens noisily and the Former Poor Man bursts into the room. He is panting as though he had been running. He is haggard and seems in great pain, for occasionally he moans. He looks wildly about the room and seeing Imp asleep in the chair, he rushes to him and shakes

him roughly. Imp wakes, slowly yawning and rubbing his eyes.)

FORMER POOR MAN (*Frantically*): The Judge, where is he, I must see him at once.

IMP (*Yawning*): You're too early. He isn't down yet. (*Settles himself to go to sleep again.*)

FORMER POOR MAN (*Walking the floor and holding his hands to his stomach*): Don't go to sleep again. I'm nearly crazy. What time does the Judge get here? Where does he live; can't we send for him?

IMP (*Indifferently*): Oh, he is liable to come any minute, and then he may not come for an hour or two.

FORMER POOR MAN (*Pacing the floor, moaning and rubbing his stomach*): Oh, I can't stand it much longer. It's driving me wild I tell you. I do wish the Judge would come.

IMP (*Getting up from his chair and keeping step with the Poor Man*): What's the matter; I thought all you wanted was to eat, drink and be merry.

FORMER POOR MAN (*Frantically waving his arms*): Eat, drink and be merry, be damned. Everything I eat gives me indigestion something awful; everything I drink gives it to me worse. How can I be merry when I am in this torment all the time? I tell you this pain is driving me mad! I want to get rid of it quick. Oh, why doesn't the Judge come?

IMP: What's the Judge got to do with it?

FORMER POOR MAN (*Pathetically*): I am going to beg him to take back this indigestion and give me back my poverty. It was not so bad after all, not nearly so bad as this darned pain in my stomach.

(The street door opens slowly and a sorrowful woman enters. She is weeping softly. It is the Vain Woman. Gone is her posing and her proud manner. She walks humbly to the railing, and not seeing the Judge, she turns to Imp. The Former Poor Man looks at the Vain Woman frowningly muttering "What's she here for?" Then he sits down at the left and rocks back and forth in misery.)

VAIN WOMAN *(Tearfully)*: I must see the Judge right away, please.

IMP *(Languidly)*: He isn't down yet. You're too earl—

VAIN WOMAN *(Interrupting)*: Tell him that it is very important, that I am in great distress and that he must see me at once.

IMP *(Loudly)*: I said that he was not down yet. *(Seeing that she does not understand, he takes a writing pad from his desk, scribbles a few words, and standing in front of her holds it up for her to read.)*

VAIN WOMAN *(After reading)*: Oh, when will he be here? Can't you get him to come right away? Oh, I am so unhappy. *(She walks the floor in agitation. The Former Poor Man grunts in irritation and turns his back on her.)* I can not hear a word that is said to me. No one seems to want me around, and I am not invited out any more. I have the feeling that people are making fun of me instead of praising my beauty. Oh, it is dreadful to be deaf! *(Getting hysterical.)* I want the Judge to take away this deafness. I would rather have my wrinkles. *(Imp shakes his head in pretended sympathy saying,*

"Too bad, too bad." *She misunderstands and cries out*): Has the Judge given away my wrinkles? I want them back; I want my very own wrinkles, too. Wrinkles are distinguished-looking. (*Beginning to sob.*) I don't want to be deaf any longer.

IMP (*Running over to the Former Poor Man*): Say, this lady feels very bad; can't you cheer her up a little?

FORMER POOR MAN (*Who is still rocking back and forth with his own misery, looks up at Imp in disgust*): Cheer—her—up, me? What's the joke?

(*The Vain Woman walks to the curtained door, looks in as if seeking something, then returns to a chair where she sits weeping softly.*

(*A peculiar thumping is heard at the street door. The Former Poor Man jumps to his feet in expectancy, hoping it is the Judge. Imp, also, stands waiting. The door opens as though the person that opened it did so with difficulty. The Former Rich Citizen hobbles in. He is ragged and dirty and one foot is bandaged, which causes him to use a crutch. He carries a large milk can. He hobbles painfully to the center of the stage. The Former Poor Man grunts with disappointment and sits down again rubbing away at his stomach. The Vain Woman sits with bowed head silently weeping. The Former Rich Citizen looks about; then addresses Imp in rather a husky voice.*)

FORMER RICH CITIZEN: I wish to see the Judge at once. It is most urgent.

IMP (*With an ill concealed smile*): You can't see the Judge at once.

FORMER RICH CITIZEN (*Impatiently*): Why not, I told you it was most urgent.

IMP (*Grinning openly*): Because he isn't here. He hasn't come in yet. What's your trouble?

FORMER RICH CITIZEN (*Vehemently*): Trouble! Everything's the trouble! I have been abused, insulted, overworked,—even the cows have kicked me. (*Looking down at his bandaged foot.*) I can't stand it. I want back my proper place in the world where I am respected, and where I can rest and sleep, and mingle with my kind. (*He hobbles to a chair and sits down wearily.*)

FORMER POOR MAN (*Getting up from his chair, walks over to the former Rich Citizen, waggles his finger in his face and speaks fretfully*): What cause have you to squeal so? If you had indigestion like I have all the time, you might be entitled to raise a holler. Why, I can't eat a thing without having the most awful pain right here, (*puts his hand to the pit of his stomach*) and when I take a drink, oh, heavens, it—

FORMER RICH CITIZEN (*Interrupting contemptuously*): You big baby, howling about the stomach ache. If you had a man-sized trouble, there might be some excuse for you. Now I, who have been used to wealth and respect, have been subjected to the most grueling ordeals; why in that dairy there were a million cows and they kicked me, and horned me, and I—

VAIN WOMAN: (*Walks over to them, interrupting their talk, and speaks in a voice punctuated with*

sniffing sobs.) Have—(*sniff*) either of you gentlemen (*sniff*) ever been deaf; (*sniff, sniff*) it is a terrible thing (*sniff*) for a beautiful woman like I am (*sniff*) to have such an affliction. (*Sniff, sniff, sniff.*)

(*Former Rich Citizen shrugs his shoulders indifferently and limps to the other side of the stage where he sits.*)

FORMER POOR MAN: (*Stalks over to the railing where he leans limply.*) Lord deliver me from a sniffing woman.

(*Imp who is perched on his desk, chuckles wickedly at their sufferings. Vain Woman sinks dejectedly into the chair vacated by the Former Rich Citizen.*

(*A knock is heard at the street door. The Former Poor Man and the Former Rich Citizen start up eagerly, expecting the Judge. Even the Vain Woman, seeing the others rise, gets to her feet hopefully. Imp hastily slides from his desk, and pulling down his tight little jacket and cocking his round little hat a trifle more over one eye, goes jauntily to see who knocks. A messenger hands him a letter and silently departs.*)

IMP (*Importantly*): Letter for me from the Judge.

FORMER POOR MAN: A letter! Why doesn't he come himself?

FORMER RICH CITIZEN: Send for him, boy.

IMP (*Grins insolently at the Former Rich Citizen*): Well, well, I wonder what the Judge is writing to me about. It's queer that he would send me a letter. (*He looks the letter over carefully, both sides, holds*

it up to the light, shakes it, smells it. The two men and the woman grow more and more nervous.)

FORMER POOR MAN (*Extremely irritated*): For God's sake, open it and read it.

FORMER RICH CITIZEN: Yes, yes, don't be so long about it.

(Vain Woman simply stands pathetically and waits. Imp walks over to his desk, hunts around for a paper-knife, finally finds one; looks the letter over again and at last slits the envelope and draws out the letter which he reads silently, not letting the others see. They are breathlessly waiting. Imp whistles softly in surprise.)

IMP: Well, what do you think of that!

FORMER POOR MAN (*Excitedly*): What is it, why don't you tell us?

FORMER RICH CITIZEN (*Pounding with his crutch on the floor*): Come, come, don't keep me waiting like this.

IMP (*Reads letter again, silently, chuckling*): All right. Here it is. (*Reads*): "My dear Imp. I have tried faithfully for years to aid distressed humanity, but they are an ungrateful lot of fools and I wash my hands of them. When this letter reaches you, I will be on the high seas and I am never coming back. So, write *finis* in the big old ledger of miseries and shut up the shop for the Exchange is closed forever. Yours in disgust, The Judge."

(They all stand dazed a moment. The Vain Woman, sensing that something terrible has happened, rushes from one to the other saying, "What is it,

what has happened?" Imp gives her the letter to read.)

FORMER POOR MAN (*In a perfect frenzy*): My God! Indigestion all the rest of my days!

VAIN WOMAN (*After reading letter collapses in a chair, hysterically sobbing out*): Deaf, always deaf, oh, what shall I do!

FORMER RICH CITIZEN (*Leaning heavily on his crutch and shaking his free hand clenched in anger*): This is an outrage. I am rich and have influence and I shall take steps to—to—

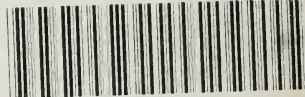
(Imp laughs mockingly. The man looks down at his milk spattered clothes, his bandaged foot, and letting his crutch fall to the floor, sinks dejectedly into a chair burying his face in his hands.

(Imp dangles his keys and opens the street door as an invitation for them to go. The Former Poor Man is the first to start, moving dazedly and breathing hard. Imp offers him the bottle of indigestion tablets; the man grasps them eagerly, tipping Imp, who chuckles as he pockets the money. The Poor Man takes a tablet as he exits. The Vain Woman, bowed with sorrow, moves slowly toward the door. Imp touches her arm and offers the ear trumpet; she accepts it with a wild sob, tipping Imp who again chuckles as he pockets the money. The last we see of the Vain Woman she is trying to hold the ear trumpet to her ear and exits sobbing. The Former Rich Citizen still sits in his chair his head in his hands. Imp picks up the milk can, and tapping the man not too gently on the shoulder, thrusts the milk

can at him and makes a significant gesture, indicative of—THIS WAY OUT. The man rises dejectedly, picks up his crutch, takes the milk can and hobbles painfully toward the door. Imp doubles himself up in wild Mephistophelian glee as the

CURTAIN FALLS

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